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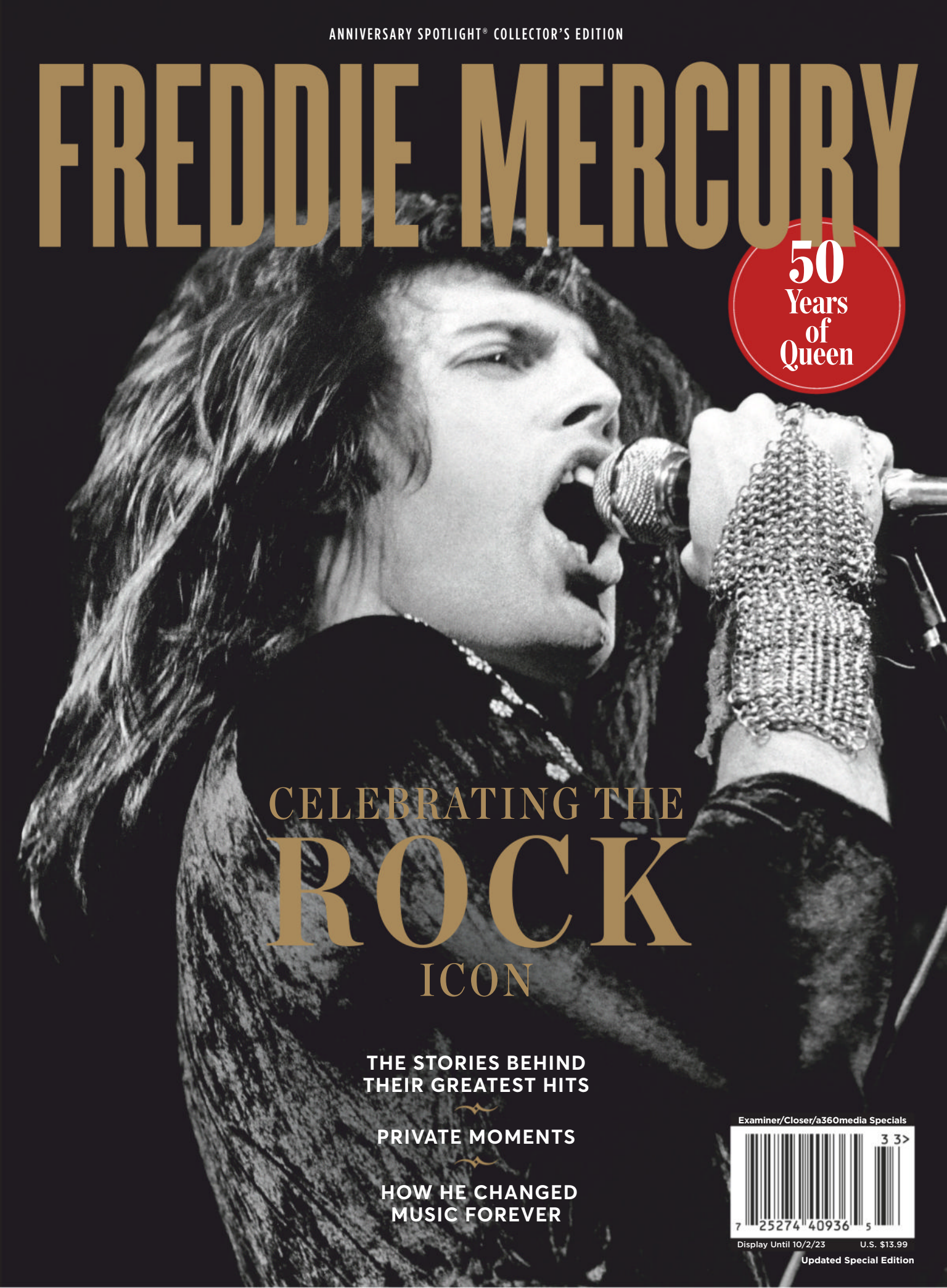
FREDDIE MERCURY

50 Years of Queen



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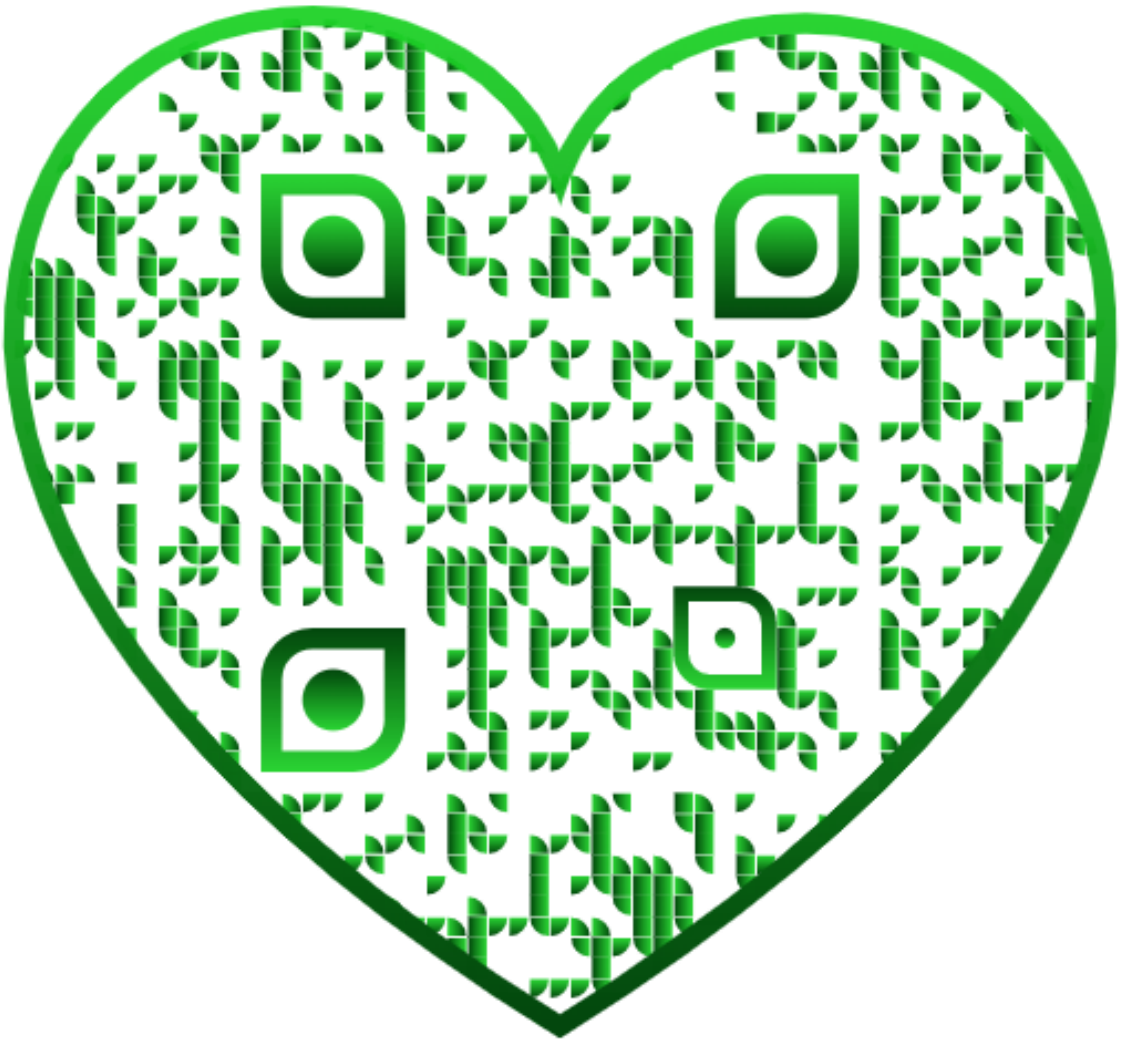

ANNIVERSARY SPOTLIGHT® COLLECTOR'S EDITION

FREDDIE MERCURY

50 YEARS OF QUEEN

"The concept of Queen is to be regal and majestic," the singer, here onstage in California in 1982, once said. "We want to shock and be outrageous."

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Test your smarts on the spectacular Queen frontman, from his favorite color to his favorite drink.

Freddie Mercury flashes a rare toothy grin backstage before a show in 1977.

Freddie Mercury, performing here in 1975, always aimed high. "I'm not going to be a star," he once said, "I'm going to be a legend!"

Freddie Mercury
A Kind of Magic

Why do we love Freddie Mercury? There are many reasons. For starters, he was a brilliant performer, an exceptional singer and one of the great songwriters of the 20th century. But what really made him a rock 'n' roll treasure was the delight and humor that he brought to his art.

From the moment Queen's self-titled debut album was released on July 13, 1973, fans have been uplifted by the timeless music crafted by Freddie and his bandmates. Consider the following songs and try not to smile: "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," "Fat Bottomed Girls," "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Don't Stop Me Now." It's impossible.

Onstage he was outrageous and hilarious. Who else in music history had the sheer audacity and talent to exhort thousands of ecstatic fans to sing "We Are the Champions" while dressed in fire-engine-red short-shorts or in an absurdly over-the-top royal crown and velvet cape? And only Freddie could rock silver spandex or a sunflower yellow jumpsuit with such brilliant aplomb.

The singer had his share of personal issues and heartaches, but he never let them get in the way of his true calling—bringing joy to this world. When Freddie died in November 1991, we lost a deeply talented musician and a genuinely lovely man. However, we're thrilled to bring you his story in all of its wonderful complexity, from his birth in Zanzibar, off the East African coast, to his meteoric career in Queen, to his untimely death.

Though he was taken from us far too soon, he'll forever be remembered for how he made us feel. "I love the fact I can make people happy, in any form," he once said. "Even if it's just an hour of their lives, if I can make them feel lucky or make them feel good, or bring a smile to a sour face, that to me is worthwhile."

BRAD TOLINSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/WRITER

I Want to Break Free

FROM THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH IN ZANZIBAR, FREDDIE MERCURY WAS DESTINED TO BE A DIFFERENT KIND OF ROCK STAR.

From Elvis Presley to Kurt Cobain, rock 'n' roll heroes have almost always risen from humble, working-class beginnings. Not Freddie Mercury; there was never anything conventional, working class or humble about Queen's colorful lead singer, starting with his childhood.

He was born Farrokh Bulsara on Sept. 5, 1946, in the British protectorate of Zanzibar, off the eastern coast of Tanzania, Africa, to Parsee parents who practiced Zoroastrianism. When Farrokh was 8 years old, his father, Bomi, a well-off high-court cashier for the British government, sent him to St. Peter's Church of England School in Panchgani, India, one of the foremost boarding schools in that part of the world. It was there that the boy began his unusual journey to becoming one of the greatest rock musicians the world has ever known.

Farrokh demonstrated a keen ear for music at an early age, and his mother, who noticed his natural talent, arranged for him to take private piano lessons. While his family instilled in him an appreciation for classical music, including opera, it was at school during the 1950s that the boy developed a passion for the keyboard-based rock 'n' roll of Little Richard and Fats Domino.

When he was 12, Farrokh and some classmates formed a group called the Hectics, which played raucous hits by Elvis, Cliff Richard and Domino. One of his former bandmates later remembered, "The only music he listened to and played was Western pop music," and that "he had an uncanny ability to listen to the radio and play what he heard on the piano."

Farrokh loved American rock, so when his teachers Westernized his name to "Freddie," he gratefully adopted it and made it his own. But that wasn't the only thing he affected.

If the recollections of his fellow students are to be believed, many of the mannerisms he had as

1. Freddie Mercury, whose birth name was Farrokh Bulsara, was born to Bomi and Jer Bulsara at Zanzibar's Government Hospital on Sept.5,1946. **2.** The family lived in the Zanzibar district known as Stone Town, in a flat overlooking the sea. **3.** The building has been turned into The Tembo House Hotel, with a sign proudly displaying the name of the star who once lived there.

Freddie, as a schoolboy, proudly sits with a large trophy. Later in life he was self-conscious of his teeth, often smiling with his mouth closed.

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"I was quite rebellious, and my parents hated it. I grew out of living at home at an early age." —FREDDIE MERCURY

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an adult were already fully formed by the time he was a teenager. Some said he carried himself like an aristocrat and was in the habit of calling people "darling," which one classmate said seemed "a little fey.... It simply wasn't something boys did in those days."

Despite his pretensions, Freddie was well-liked. Janet Smith, who knew him at the boarding school, told Lesley-Ann Jones, author of *Freddie Mercury: The Definitive Biography*, that it was accepted that Freddie was gay. While ordinarily this would've been frowned upon, "with Freddie somehow it wasn't. It was okay."

In 1963, at the age of 17, Freddie returned to Zanzibar and his family. The next year, however, a revolution overthrew the ruling Arab elite, and thousands were killed. The Bulsara family fled to England to escape the violence and settled into a small house in Middlesex, not far from London. Freddie studied art at Isleworth Polytechnic, in West London, but in 1966 transferred to the more prestigious Ealing Art College, the same school attended by the Who's Pete Townshend and the Rolling Stones' Ron Wood before they became star musicians.

Longing for the freedom he'd enjoyed at boarding school, Freddie moved in 1967 from the stifling confines of his conservative family home to an apartment in Kensington, with his friend Chris Smith. Kensington was a hotbed of artistic activity and home to the sprawling Kensington Market and the legendary Biba clothing boutique, both of which were frequented by all the coolest kids and fashion tastemakers of the day.

It was also the year Jimi Hendrix took London by storm. Freddie became obsessed with the psychedelic guitarist, who rekindled his interest in rock music. Around that time he became good friends with bassist Tim Staffell, a fellow student at Ealing who played in a band called Smile with guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor.

Freddie saw the trio rehearse and was transformed. Suddenly, his ambition to be a graphic artist faded away, supplanted by a desire to become a rock star—the biggest in the world. "I got my diploma and then I thought I'd chance it as a freelance artist," he recalled. "I did it for a couple of months but then I thought, 'My god, I've done enough.' The interest just wasn't there. And the music thing just grew and grew. I realized [it] was the biggest thing in my life, and I decided to try and make a living from it. It's as simple as that." ■

1. As a young boy, he was sent thousands of miles away at age 8 to St. Peter's Church of England school in Panchgani, known today as Mumbai. **2.** Brian May and Mercury's mother, Jer Bulsara, attend the "Freddie for a Day" 65th birthday party in London in 2011. **3.** Freddie's sister, Kashmira Bulsara, at the sixth anniversary of the *We Will Rock You* musical in London in 2006. **4.** In front of the Biba clothes boutique in Kensington Market. **5.** Where Freddie lived with his parents after the family arrived in the U.K. from Zanzibar in 1963.**6.** Freddie's hero, Jimi Hendrix.

Everybody... Smile!

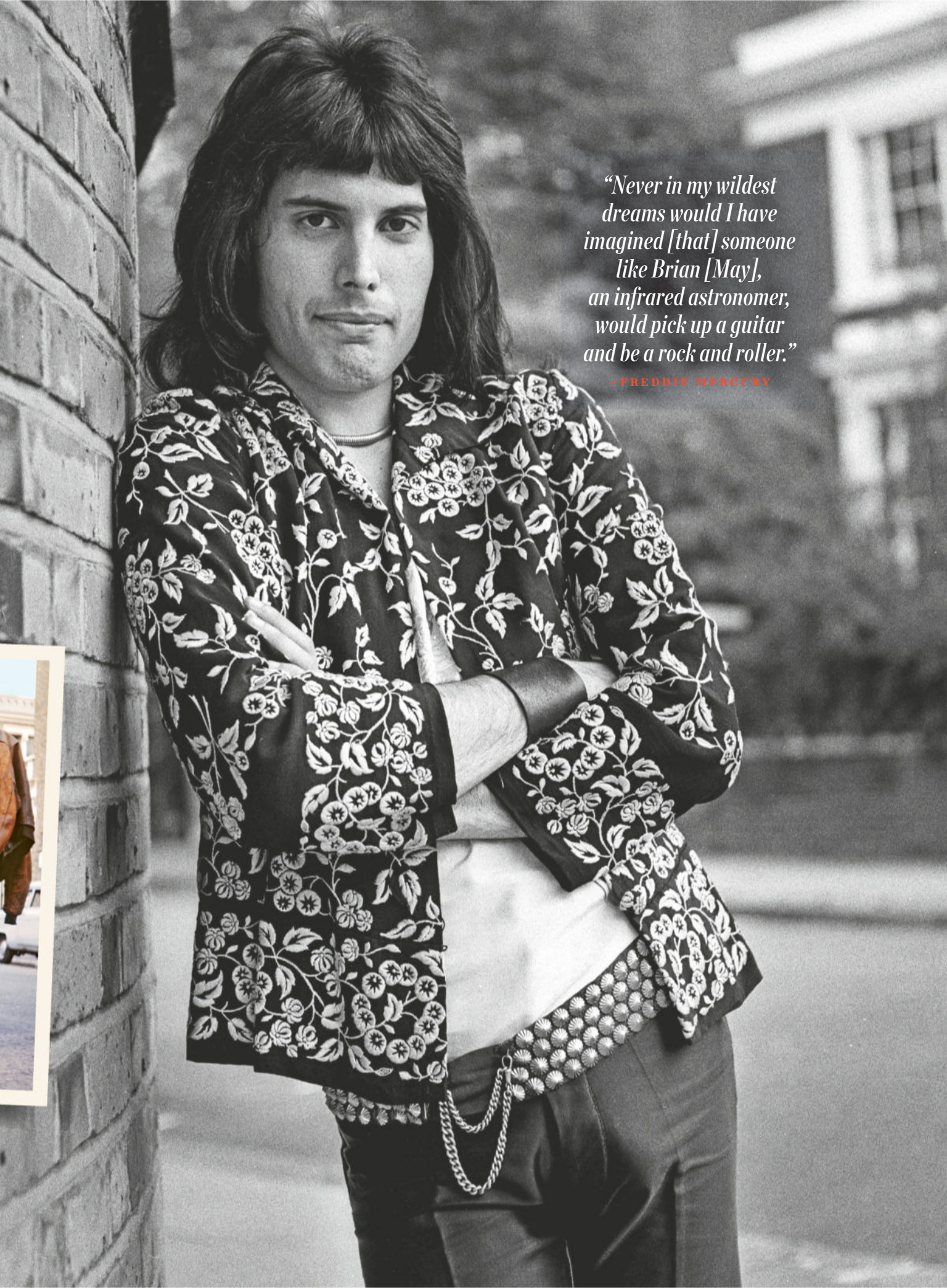
THE TALENTED AND AMBITIOUS SINGER HELPED TRANSFORM A STRUGGLING LONDON COMBO INTO ROCK 'N' ROLL ROYALTY.

While attending Ealing Art College, Freddie Bulsara struck up a close friendship with fellow student Tim Staffell, who played bass and sang with Smile, a well-regarded band on the club circuit that had opened for established groups such as Pink Floyd, T. Rex and Free. Aware that Freddie was a serious musician and had a keen interest in rock 'n' roll, Staffell invited him down to one of his band's rehearsals.

Freddie was deeply impressed with what he heard, and he immediately hit it off with the other two band members, guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor. He particularly connected with Taylor, who like himself was outgoing and a bit of a fashionista.

This was London in the late '60s, where clothes had assumed a particular importance in how people defined themselves, and Freddie could usually be seen in floral jackets and multicolored shirts, much in the style of his hero, Jimi Hendrix.

(Opposite page) Freddie being a man about town in London, 1973. (Inset) Brian May and Tim Staffell of Smile posed with friends in Addison Gardens, West Kensington, London, in August 1969. Left to right: Bruce Sanderson (with eye patch), Paul Humbertone and May (sitting), Pete Edmunds, Staffell, Clive Armitage and Paul Fielder.



"Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined [that] someone like Brian [May], an infrared astronomer, would pick up a guitar and be a rock and roller."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

Freddie loved the group and became a fixture at their shows. And, being Freddie, he offered his opinions freely—whether the band wanted them or not—including how they should style themselves and even the way they should sit, stand, walk and talk. "He offered suggestions in a way that couldn't be refused," said May. "He would say, 'You guys are brilliant, brilliant! But you should do this, and you should do this!'"

And in some ways Smile did need a bit of coaching. May and Taylor were unlikely candidates for rock stardom. The gangly guitarist was a physics, math and astronomy major at the prestigious Imperial College, while the blond, striking-looking Taylor was a dental student. But despite their academic backgrounds, Freddie recognized their vast potential—they were attractive, a bit stylish and their intelligence helped make them stellar musicians. He felt that all they needed was a friendly shove in the right direction.

An Art School Graduate

When Freddie graduated from Ealing he had no interest in jumping into a 9-to-5 job, so he and Taylor decided to run a stall in the three-story Kensington Market, on the antiques trading alley known as "Death Row." Unabashed clotheshorses, they sold dandy paraphernalia such as secondhand scarves, jackets and fur stoles to their friends and other club kids. Staffell later maintained that this is where "the camp side" of Freddie's nature came into full bloom.

He also finally worked up the nerve to get onstage and perform with bands with names like Ibex and Sour Milk Sea. None measured up to the singer's exacting standards, but they gave him the chance to develop his look and attitude.

Meanwhile, Smile continued to do well, but they lacked that special "something" that would get them to the big leagues. In the spring of 1970, Staffell, frustrated with the band's lack of progress, announced that he was leaving to join Humpy Bong, a new group that included former Bee Gees drummer Colin Petersen.

"Roger and I were suddenly left with no group," said May. "We wondered if we should give up. But then young Freddie Bulsara came to the rescue."

"Freddie sort of got us and said, 'C'mon, you can't give up. I want to sing,'" said Taylor. Oddly, though they were friends, May and Taylor had never seen Freddie onstage. And when they did, they were more than a little taken aback. "It was scary!" said May. "He was wild and untutored but massively charismatic."

The duo was surprised that the answer to their problem had been standing right next to them all along. Not Freddie, though—he had been patiently waiting for the opportunity. He knew that Smile was a great band that lacked the right singer. And now he was going to take them to the top. ■

1. The pre-Queen Freddie Mercury band Ibex and friends from left to right: Freddie, Paul "Flogger" Fielder, unknown, John "Tupp" Taylor (shirtless), Pat McConnell, Sian Ollett, Ken Testi, Bruce Sanderson, unknown and "Miffer" Smith. **2.** Freddie pictured at Ealing Art College in London, 1969. **3.** John Deacon, Freddie, Roger Taylor and Brian May, with his Fender Stratocaster guitar, perform on the set of the Dutch TV show *TopPop* in 1974.

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LOVE OF MY LIFE

THE MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP FREDDIE EVER HAD WAS WITH MARY AUSTIN.

• **When Freddie Mercury** first met Mary Austin, he was 24 years old and she was 19, and at the time neither could've imagined what the future would hold for them.

Austin worked at the fashionable Biba boutique in Kensington, West London, when she befriended Freddie, who ran a hip antique clothes stall with drummer Roger Taylor at nearby Kensington Market.

"He was like no one I had met before," she told the U.K.'s *Daily Mail*. "He was very confident—something I have never been." Austin was the reserved daughter of working-class parents who were both deaf and communicated through sign language. She seemed like an unlikely companion for the flamboyant singer, but she had a caring nature that appealed to a man who'd been raised in boarding schools, away from family.

Before Queen became successful, the couple moved into a one-bedroom flat, where at one point he gave her a jade ring and proposed marriage. But as he became successful, his sexual impulses became an issue and he withdrew the offer.

"I'll never forget that moment," Austin said. "Being a bit naïve, it had taken me a while to realize the truth. Afterwards he felt good about having told me he was bisexual. Although I do remember saying to him at the time, 'No, Freddie, I don't think you are bisexual. I think you are gay.'"

Freddie would confide in her throughout his life. "All my lovers asked me why they couldn't replace Mary, but it's impossible. To me, she was my common-law wife," he explained of the pair's powerful and enduring bond. "To me, it was a marriage."

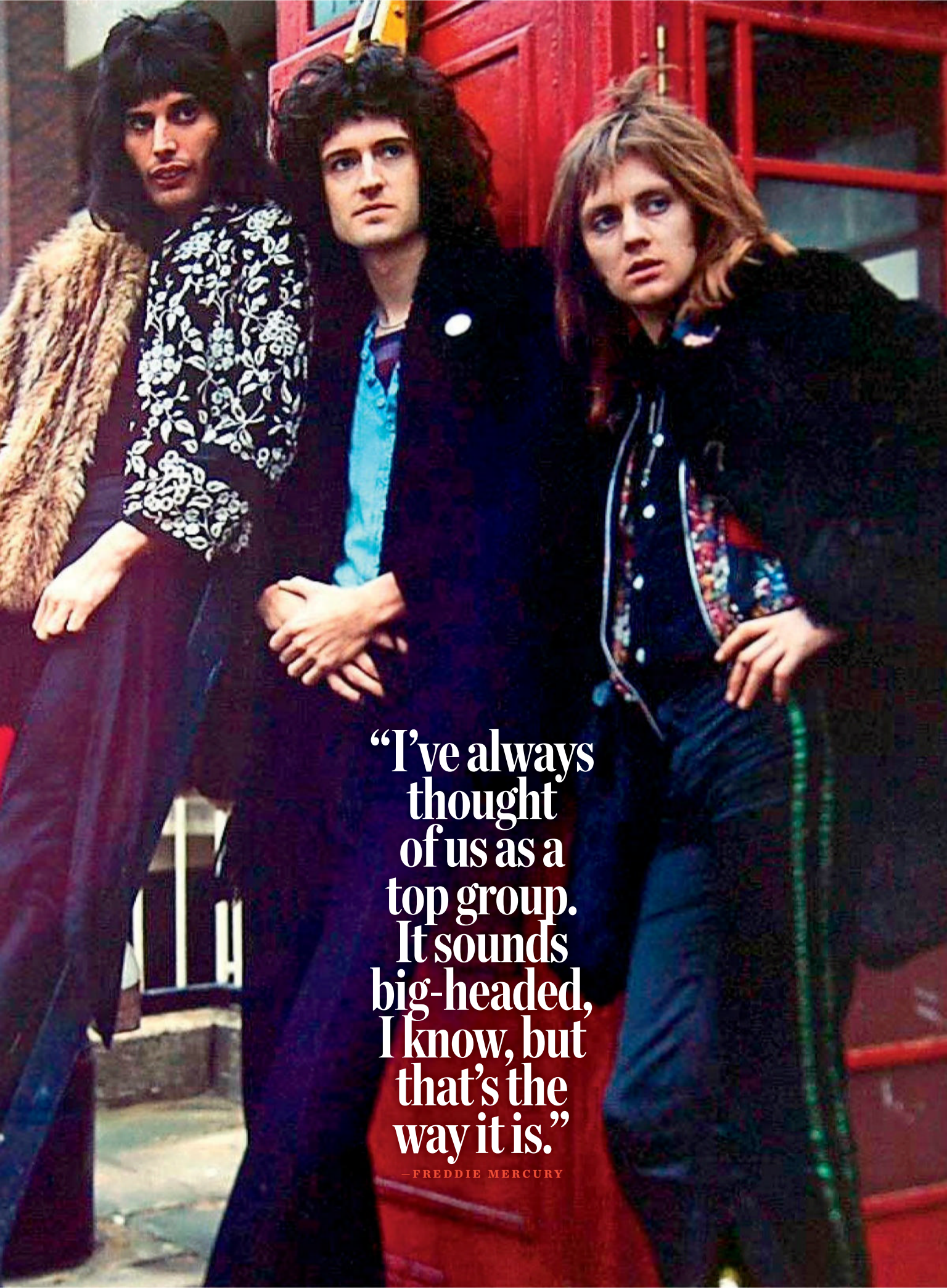
Mercury Rising

THE FRONTMAN DECLARED HIMSELF A "MESSENGER OF THE GODS" AND TOOK QUEEN TO A NEW LEVEL—BUT THEIR FIRST TWO ALBUMS GOT OFF TO A DISAPPOINTINGLY SLOW START.

As soon as Freddie Mercury joined Smile, he quickly began shaping them in his image. The first thing he did was insist that they needed a fresh start and a new name.

"I felt everything had to be new," he said. "I thought up the name Queen early on. It couldn't have been King; that didn't have the same ring or aura as Queen, [a] very regal name [that] sounded splendid. It was strong, very universal and immediate. It had a lot of visual potential and was open to all kinds of interpretations. I was certainly aware of the gay connotations, but that was just one facet of it. Yes, we were a bit worried that the name would give people the wrong idea, but we knew our music would override it. Besides, the camp image had already been made acceptable by [David] Bowie and T. Rex—we were just taking it to another level."

An early 1973 publicity photo of the band taken after the release of their debut album. The recording showcased the influence of contemporary rock bands such as Led Zeppelin, while the lyrics were reflective of "mystical sword 'n' sorcerers themes."



"I've always thought of us as a top group. It sounds big-headed, I know, but that's the way it is."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

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Brian May and Roger Taylor were a little less enthusiastic about the new moniker, but Freddie could be very convincing, and it didn't take much more cajoling by him for them to see the audacious humor and irony in calling the group Queen. In any case, they didn't have much to worry about—thanks to Smile's popularity, the guys were regularly besieged by women.

But changing the band's name wasn't quite enough for Freddie; he also wanted to reinvent himself. He began using mascara, painting his fingernails black and wearing clinging catsuits onstage. And he dropped his last name, Bulsara, in favor of the far more theatrical Mercury, the name of the messenger of the gods in Roman mythology.

As May told journalist Lesley-Ann Jones, "Freddie had written this song called 'My Fairy King,' and there's a line in it that says, 'Oh Mother Mercury look what they've done to me.' And it was after that he said, 'I am going to become Mercury as the mother in this song is my mother.' And we were like, 'Are you mad?' But changing his name was part of him assuming this different skin. The Bulsara was still there, but for the public he was going to be this god."

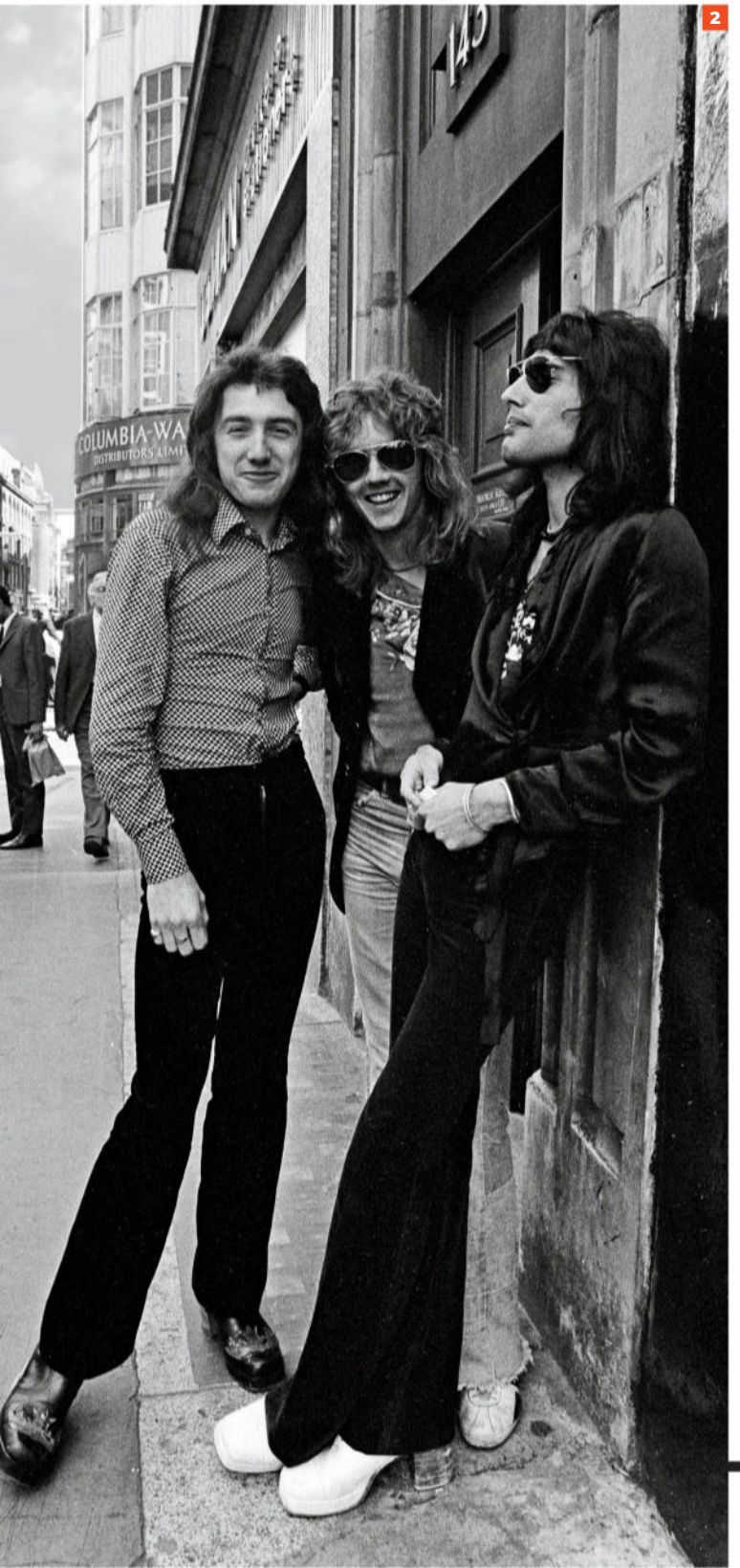
John Deacon Arrives

It was all well and good for the band to adopt the name Queen and for Freddie to deify himself, but it would mean very little for the band's future if they couldn't find themselves a decent bassist. So, for the next few months they searched for one who could not only play well but was able to mesh with them personally and buy into their concept for the band.

That they wound up hiring John Deacon, a quiet, unassuming sort, might have struck some as odd, given Freddie's personal flamboyance and Queen's ambition. But drummer Taylor rightly reasoned that the band's three core members were so fractious that bringing in Deacon, who would "fit without too much upheaval," was exactly what they needed. They were also excited by the fact that Deacon was an electronics savant, which meant that they'd found someone who could fix their gear when something went wrong at a gig.

By the end of 1971 Queen's lineup was set, but they had one major problem—the band was still going nowhere fast. After recording a polished five-song demo tape at De Lane Lea studios in London, however, they began attracting some of the attention they'd anticipated—not

1. Queen rehearsing for their first major tour, July 8, 1973. The band had been playing in clubs around London, but it would be the first time they would take their act on the road. **2.** John Deacon, Roger Taylor and Freddie Mercury being interviewed outside their offices in London for Japanese music magazine *Music Life*, June 13, 1974. Brian May was absent because of the flu. Queen would always feel tremendous loyalty to their Japanese fans. They were the first to embrace the band, and intrinsic to their success.



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BLACK & WHITE & QUEEN ALL OVER

MICK ROCK RECALLS HIS ICONIC COVER SHOOT.

• **"They knew they** had the magic," said photographer Mick Rock (above) three decades after he met Queen in September 1973. "That was firmly imprinted on me. They were confident in the way that David Bowie was."

Rock shot some of the most indelible music images of the early 1970s, including the one that graced the cover of Lou Reed's *Transformer* and many of the best-known photos of Bowie as Ziggy Stardust. It was no surprise that Queen was anxious to have him photograph and design the cover of their second album, *Queen II*.

"The brief was that it was to be a gatefold cover and the theme was black and white," Rock told *Classic Rock* magazine. "Around that time, I'd got to know [film historian] John Kobal, who had all of these Hollywood pictures he'd picked up free on the studio lots. He was making these little books, and he'd done one on [actress] Marlene Dietrich. There was this shot of her with her arms crossed, taken on the set of *Shanghai Express*. I showed Freddie this book with the picture, and he said: 'I shall be Marlene...'"

Rock did two photo shoots with the band, one with a black background while the other was white. Mercury and Rock preferred the black shots for the cover while the rest of the band liked the white. Freddie was outvoted, but he badgered the band until they relented.

The cover image attained a measure of iconic status, and the group re-created it later in their groundbreaking video for the song "Bohemian Rhapsody."

from a record label, but the brothers Barry and Norman Sheffield, who ran Trident, a major London recording studio. Their interest was both significant and highly complimentary, as Trident was a world-class operation where the Beatles worked when they wanted to take a break from recording at Abbey Road.

The Sheffields were so taken with Queen that they offered to record their first album for free during the studio's downtime and agreed to oversee the group's management and publishing interests.

Queen finished recording their first album at the end of 1972. It was a beautifully produced piece of work, jammed with clever ideas that combined a glam rock attitude with intricate progressive arrangements. Their outrageous three-part vocal harmonies and hard rock riffs gave the album a contemporary feel even as it proclaimed that Queen was unlike any other band.

"Early on, I think Freddie and I shared the feeling that our harmony was a magical thing," said guitarist May. "I don't think any of us realized what potential he had for being a singer until we got in the studio. As soon as he was able to hear himself and work with his voice and multitrack it, he just grew exponentially. Suddenly he was in there doing all these harmonies.

"A lot of them we would do together because we were very fortunate in having three voices that blended instantly," May added. "Some of those things that sound like a 100-piece choir were just the three of us doing each line twice. That's why our harmonies are kind of in your face, and not like a big football crowd. It was just a lucky combination. Freddie had this really wonderful clear, bell-like tone. And Roger also had a remarkable voice, a very raspy sound, but he could [also] sing very high and be very strong in the high registers. And I had this voice which...filled in the gaps that the others didn't have. I had more warmth. That's my theory, anyway. And somehow the three just worked together."

Nevertheless, the major record labels were still slow to respond to the band's outstanding demo, until finally Elektra in the U.S. stepped up, followed by EMI in England. It's possible that the trepidation made some sense. Between the band's androgynous name and lyrics that regularly indulged in fantasy imagery like that of "The Fairy-Feller's Master-Stroke" and "Ogre Battle," many rock fans simply did not know what to make of the British band. Both their debut album and its follow-up, the elaborately produced *Queen II*, did relatively well commercially but they didn't live up to the band's expectations—especially in the U.S., where they managed only to attain cult status.

Their relative failure meant that Queen once again had to assess what they were doing wrong as well as right. It wasn't long before the quartet would figure things out and come to fulfill the destiny they believed they were created for: stardom. ■

Freddie and Brian May command the stage on their first headlining tour of the U.K. in 1975.

The 1975 Sheer Heart Attack Tour was the first headlining world tour by Queen. Opening acts included Lynyrd Skynyrd, Styx and Kansas.

Queen finally got the hit they were looking for with Sheer Heart Attack, *their "no-holds-barred, full-scale attack on the senses."*

ler Dillers

Freddie Mercury gives it his all on Christmas Eve at the Hammersmith Odeon in London, 1975. The show was broadcast on BBC Radio 1.

By October of 1973 Queen had already recorded their first two albums, but they were inexperienced when it came to touring. By comparison, those in the British glam outfit Mott the Hoople were grizzled veterans of the rock wars. Riding high with their biggest hit, "All the Young Dudes," the group generously offered to take Queen on a 24-date tour of the U.K. to show them how it was done.

Guitarist Brian May, ever the gentleman, was humbled by the experience. "On tour as support to Mott, I was conscious that we were in the presence of something great...something highly evolved and close to the center of the spirit of rock 'n' roll," he said. "Something to breathe in and learn from."

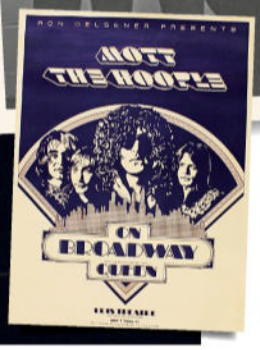
May wasn't just being diplomatic. Mott the Hoople was underappreciated in the U.S., but it was one of the great British rock bands of the 1970s. Lead singer Ian Hunter's intense rapport with his audience led to comparisons to stellar showmen like Bruce Springsteen and David Bowie.

Freddie, however, was not enthusiastic about touring with Mott. He couldn't stand the idea of playing second fiddle to anyone, and later described it as "one of the most traumatic experiences of my life." But while the singer hated to admit it, he learned a lot by watching Hunter's skillful handling of the crowd every night.

"[Queen] said they picked up a lot of their stagecraft from Mott the Hoople," Hunter said with some satisfaction, and then added with a shrug, "You've got to pick it up from somewhere."

Hunter and his band knew Queen could be a little big for their britches at times, but he admired the group's intelligence, professionalism and potential, and also invited them to go with his band on a tour of America.

Queen was steadily making a name for themselves in England, but they were virtually unknown in the U.S., making Hunter's offer especially magnanimous. Freddie



1. Queen is presented with gold discs for *Queen II* and *Sheer Heart Attack* at the Tokyo Prince Hotel, April 1975. **2.** The band poses with Ian Hunter of Mott the Hoople (center) and music producer Roy Thomas Baker (right) at the Montreal Forum, January 1977.

and his group were obscure, but thanks to their energetic live show and glamorous image they were warmly received at their first performances in the States. Still, Freddie told Hunter of his frustration over the audiences not being enthusiastic enough, causing Mott's frontman to laugh. "It's a big country," he patiently explained. "You've got to go around three or four times before it happens. It's not like England, where you can conquer it in a day!"

On May 7, when Mott and Queen had just concluded an important six-night residency at New York's prestigious Uris Theater, disaster struck for Queen: May fell ill and was diagnosed with hepatitis, and the band had to leave the country just as their record sales were starting to pick up.

May was out of commission for the next six weeks, which felt like an eternity to a band that was on the brink of success. Not only did they have to bail on a great tour, but May's illness meant he was also unable to work

GUARANTEED TO BLOW YOUR MIND

ALL ABOUT THE MAKING OF "KILLER QUEEN," FREDDIE'S CELEBRATED SONG ABOUT A HIGH-CLASS CALL GIRL.

• "I'm not being conceited or anything, but it just fell into place, as some songs sometimes do," said Freddie Mercury of Queen's first hit single, "Killer Queen." Apparently, the writing process was as simple as the song sounds.

Typically, Freddie composed the music first and wrote lyrics later, but "Killer" was different. "I scribbled down the words in the dark one Saturday night, and the next morning I got them all together and [worked] all day…and that was it. I got it. It gelled and it was great. It's about a high-class call girl. I was trying to say that classy people can be whores as well."

In 1975, "Killer Queen" earned Freddie the Ivor Novello Award from the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors. He took pride in the award, as they weren't subject to lobbying by publishers or record companies but were judged and presented by his peers—the songwriting community.

"We were very proud of that number," Freddie said. "When I finished writing [and recording] it, we found it was a very strong single. At the time it was very unlike Queen. It was another risk we took, but every risk we took up to that time paid off."

Roger Taylor, Freddie and John Deacon went on to accept Queen's Ivor Novello award for Outstanding Contribution to British Music in 1987.

Queen was on top of the world at the Tokyo Prince Hotel's garden on April 20, 1975.

on the band's new album, *Sheer Heart Attack*, which was due shortly and was only half complete.

May recovered and immediately jumped back into the studio, but soon he began feeling sick again and was unable to eat. It turned out he had an undiagnosed stomach ulcer that had been aggravated by the hepatitis, and before he could resume recording he had to spend a few weeks at home while it was treated.

In some ways, May's medical issues came at a good time. Following *Queen II*, which featured multipart epics like the "March of the Black Queen," the guys in the group decided they wanted their next album to be less ornate and more direct. May's illness virtually guaranteed they would have less time to overproduce their sound.

Ultimately, they got exactly what they wanted. The leaner *Sheer Heart Attack* still had plenty of Queen's "sound"—the massive harmonies and May's distinctive layered guitar parts—but rockers like "Brighton Rock" and "Flick of the Wrist" exploded like the Who or Led Zeppelin songs instead of floating like the progressive music of Genesis or Yes, which characterized *Queen II*.

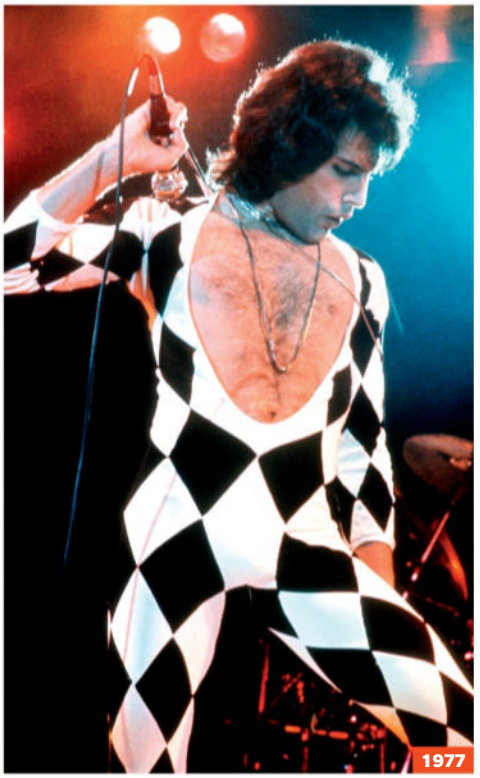
America and England loved the more dynamic approach and rewarded the band with their first Top 20 album, which peaked at No. 12 in 1975.

Nowhere was their new sound more evident than on "Stone Cold Crazy," a fast, heavy-metal barnburner that was described by *Q* magazine as "thrash metal before the term was invented." The song's lyrics also differed radically from anything on their previous efforts. With its fast and furious gangster imagery it was about as far from the fairy-tale stories of their previous album as you could get.

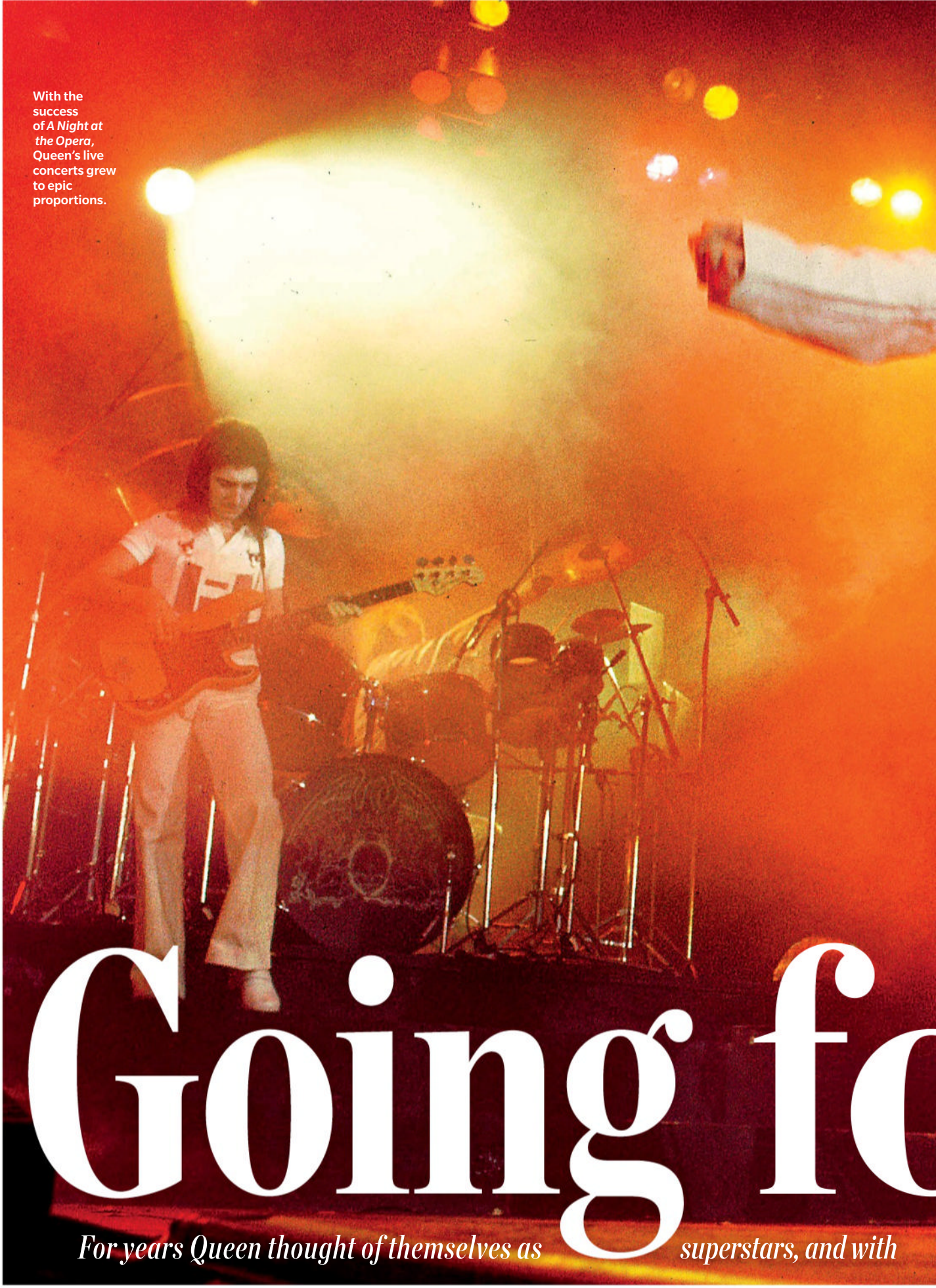
Even Freddie's campiness became more accessible. The magnificent "Killer Queen" (see sidebar, page 25), which combined the singer's love of British music hall with May's stinging guitar, became a breakthrough tune, reaching No. 2 in the U.K. and No. 12 in the U.S.

"It was the song that best summed up our kind of music and was a big hit," May said. "I still enjoy listening to it because there's a lot to listen to, [though] it never gets cluttered." With *Sheer Heart Attack*, Queen discovered how to be clever without going over the top, and the band was finally on their way to the big time. ■

Body Language



From short-shorts to military jackets, Freddie wore it all at some point in his career. But spandex unitards were by far his favorite to strut around in onstage. Here are some of his more memorable ballet-inspired costumes.



With the success of *A Night at the Opera*, Queen's live concerts grew to epic proportions.

Going fo

For years Queen thought of themselves as superstars, and with

or Broke

the release of A Night at the Opera, they truly realized their full potential.

After the success of *Sheer Heart Attack*, Queen's confidence was at an all-time high but, astoundingly, their bank accounts were at an all-time low. The band received almost none of the money earned for their previous albums because of financial issues they had with their management, and in December 1974 they hired Jim Beach as their lawyer, hoping that he could extricate them from their label deal at Trident. Queen's situation was so dire that Roger Taylor was warned not to drum too hard, as they were unable to afford new drumsticks.

"We were totally bankrupt," said Brian May. "If *Night at the Opera* hadn't been a huge success, I think we would've just disappeared under the ocean someplace. We started recording the album knowing it was live or die."

As Beach worked to free the band from their Trident contract, he hired Elton John's dynamic manager, John Reid, to handle their careers. Reid gave them the best advice a manager could give: "Go into the studio and make the best record you can make."

God Save the Queen

Aware that they might be working on their final album, Queen was absolutely fearless in the studio. They were determined to make a masterpiece or die trying, and despite their financial troubles they reportedly recorded the most expensive album ever made at

the time, with costs estimated at £40,000 (equivalent to $417,400 in 2020). It was recorded at seven different studios over a period of four months. On their previous albums the band used 16-track tape, but now they switched to the 24-track format, which allowed them to record with greater freedom to experiment.

By this time, they'd gotten their signature vocal harmonies down to a science, with May singing the lower registers, Freddie Mercury the middle registers and Taylor, with his freakishly high voice, handling the soprano parts, and applied them to most of their songs. But the process still took time, and that meant money.

Freddie contributed five of the album's 12 songs, including the vicious opener, "Death on Two Legs," and, of course, the epic "Bohemian Rhapsody." "Death on Two Legs" was atypical for the frontman in its harshness. A poison letter directed at Norman Sheffield, their former manager at Trident, it is also one of the few straight up rock numbers on the entire album.

"It's the most spiteful lyric I've ever written," admitted Freddie. "It was so vindictive that Brian felt bad singing the backing vocals on it. No one would believe how much hate and venom went into the singing of that song, let alone the lyrics themselves. I don't usually like to explain what I was thinking when I write songs, but it's about a nasty old man that I used to know. I decided [that] if I was going to make it a vile little number, I might as well go whole hog and not compromise." When he sang it, Freddie continued, "I gave it so much attitude that my throat was bleeding. I was changing lyrics every day, trying to get it as vicious as possible. When the others heard it, they were in a state of shock. But for me the step had been taken and I was completely engrossed in it, swimming in it. It turned me into a demon for a few days."

"Death on Two Legs" was every bit as angry and hard-hitting as Freddie intended, but it was almost as if he used up all of his rock 'n' roll mojo on that track, as the rest of his compositions on the record sounded as if they were designed to transport listeners to a Victorian-era British music hall, a form of light theatrical entertainment popular in the early 1800s.

Both "Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon" and "Seaside Rendezvous" could've been composed in the 1870s, with the other members providing barbershop-quartet-style harmony over Freddie's ragtime piano accompaniment. Both songs were about as far from classic 1970s rock as you can get, making their inclusion on the album all the more audacious...and risky.

"'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' is a very perky, spicy number," said Freddie. "I love composing music on the vaudeville side of things. That's a place my mood takes

"Those were some of the strongest songs we'd ever written," Freddie Mercury, posing with Queen in 1975 to promote a Japanese tour, said of the secret to *A Night at the Opera*'s success.

ANARCHY VS. THE MONARCHY

FREDDIE MERCURY TEACHES A VICIOUS SEX PISTOL A LESSON IN MANNERS.

• In 1977 the English punk band the Sex Pistols came to prominence, hell-bent on creating "Anarchy in the U.K." and wresting rock 'n' roll from the grasp of arena bands like Pink Floyd, Genesis and Queen, all of whom they regarded as self-satisfied and decadent.

As fate would have it, Queen and the Pistols crossed paths while both bands were recording at Wessex Studios in London. They never became friends, but Queen guitarist Brian May remembers chatting with Pistol vocalist Johnny Rotten (above right, with Sid Vicious) and finding him to be "polite enough."

But one day Vicious, the Pistols' notoriously obnoxious bassist, burst into Queen's control room and started berating Freddie Mercury. The clearly inebriated Vicious sneered, "Have you succeeded in 'bringing ballet to the masses?'" a glib line Freddie often used in conversations with the media.

The Queen singer replied condescendingly, "Oh yes, Simon Ferocious. We're trying our best, dear," flicking the safety pins on his jacket in Vicious' direction.

When Vicious showed no sign of backing down, the physically fit Freddie grabbed the drunken bassist by the collar and ejected him from the studio, effectively demonstrating that he could also bring ballet to the asses.

1. Bassist John Deacon and drummer Roger Taylor work on *A Night at the Opera* in the recording studio. **2.** British DJ Kenny Everett loved "Bohemian Rhapsody" so much, he played it 14 times in two days. **3.** Elton John's manager John Reid also teamed up with Queen.

me sometimes—and it's quite a test to write in that style. 'Seaside Rendezvous' has a 1920s feel to it, as well. Roger re-creates an entire brass band using just his voice. One of these days I'm going to make him tap dance, too. I'll have to buy him some Ginger Rogers tap shoes."

A Night at the Opera has often been compared to the Beatles' classic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* because of its eclectic range of influences, including skiffle ("'39"), jazz ("Good Company") and opera ("Bohemian Rhapsody"). But given the band's precarious financial situation, they took a great chance by straying so far from the successful hard rock formula they'd only just established on *Sheer Heart Attack*.

Commercial Suicide?

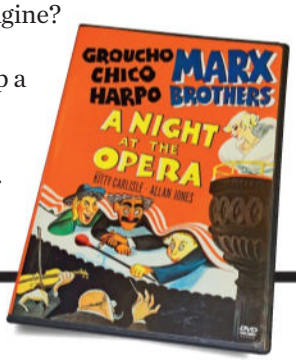
The band made things even more interesting by insisting that the first single should be "Bohemian Rhapsody." Clocking in at nearly six minutes, it freaked out the record executives, who insisted it was too long and that radio would never play it. Even staunch Queen supporter Elton John told manager John Reid "it was a surefire flop." After a long argument, the record company nixed it, but the band wasn't about to take their decision lying down. According to producer Roy Thomas Baker, he and Queen bypassed the label and gave a reel-to-reel copy to the influential British DJ Kenny Everett. He loved the song and teased his listeners by playing only parts of "Bohemian Rhapsody" until his audience demanded to hear the whole thing. At that point the DJ played it on his show 14 times in two days. In response, hordes of fans flocked to record stores, only to be told that it had yet to be released.

In the U.S., another copy of the tape was leaked to a syndication service that controlled stations in large markets, leading to a similar frenzy. It was a strange situation—radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic were playing a song the record companies said would never get any airplay. The tune went to No. 1 in the U.K. during Christmas, and it was also an unqualified success in America. The *Chicago Tribune*'s Greg Kot summed it up best when he wrote, "The song's reign as a work of wigged-out genius rather than a dated gimmick testifies to its go-for-broke attitude—one that has resonated across generations."

Queen was rewarded for that fearlessness and integrity with a pot of gold. The success of "Rhapsody" catapulted *A Night at the Opera* into the stratosphere. It topped the U.K. Albums Chart for four weeks and peaked at No. 4 on the U.S. Billboard Top 200, making it the band's first platinum-certified album in America.

"It had a very big risk factor and there were so many arguments about it," said Freddie. "Many radio people didn't like it initially because it was way too long, and the record companies said they couldn't market it that way. Somebody suggested cutting it to make it into a three-minute single, but there would've been no point to it. It consists of three different songs and they wanted me to slice it up again! Can you imagine? We've been forced into making compromises before, but cutting up a song will never be one of them."

A Night at the Opera was named after a 1935 Marx Brothers comedy. And it looked like Queen had come away with the last laugh. ■



Freddie wows the crowd at California's Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in March 1976.

The lighting and composition of Mick Rock's photo shoot for the *Queen II* cover was re-created for the groundbreaking video for "Bohemian Rhapsody."

Magnifico!

The making of the rock masterpiece "Bohemian Rhapsody."

1. Brian May and Roger Taylor have some fun at a reception in Tokyo in March 1976. **2.** The band's drummer, Taylor, sings on Queen's 1978 tour. **3.** "Freddie kept coming in with more 'Galileos' and we kept on adding to the opera section," remembers producer Roy Thomas Baker. "We never stopped laughing."

Rolling Stone called it "either a progressive rock benchmark or the most convoluted novelty song ever recorded." Time, however, has proven "Bohemian Rhapsody" to be very much the former. In 2004 the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and in December 2018 it became the internet's most streamed song recorded during the 20th century, having been downloaded or streamed more than 1.6 billion times. The video also surpassed 1 billion views on YouTube in July 2019, making it the oldest music video to reach that figure on the platform, and the first pre-1990s song to do so. (As of September 2021, it had reached more than 1.39 billion views.)

Written by Freddie Mercury for Queen's 1975 album *A Night at the Opera*, the song was a groundbreaking six-minute suite that consisted of several sections without a chorus. While the band's record company predicted that it would be a disaster, it eventually became the U.K.'s third-best-selling single ever, and in a 2012 *Rolling Stone* magazine readers' poll it was voted the best vocal performance in rock history.

"'Rhapsody' required a lot of thought," Freddie said. "It didn't just come out of thin air. Although it was tongue-in-cheek and a 'mock opera,' I still wanted it to be great. It was quite a mammoth task, actually, as it was done in three different sections and pieced together. Each one required a lot of concentration. The opera section in the middle was the most taxing because we wanted to re-create huge operatic harmonies with just Brian [May], Roger [Taylor] and me. That involved a lot of tracking, and we wanted it to escalate—we did the 'No, no, no' part about 150 times. We did so many overdubs for that song that the tape almost went transparent."

"Bohemian Rhapsody" took nearly three weeks to record, and some sections featured 180 separate overdubs. Some of the vocal interludes reportedly required Freddie, May and Taylor to sing between 10 and 12 hours a day. While everyone agrees that "Rhapsody" was a team effort, guitarist May insists that it was primarily Freddie's vision. "Freddie came in pretty well-armed for that song," May told journalist Alan di Perna. "He had these little pieces of paper with the notes of the chords written on them. Freddie even wrote those guitar riffs that everybody bangs their head to at the end of the song. I didn't change what he had very much."

May's biggest contribution was his show-stopping guitar solo. "I don't think [Freddie] had a guitar solo planned. I just streamed in during one of the sessions and said, 'This is the point where you need your solo. And these are the chords I'd like to use.'"

Perhaps the greatest compliment the band received came from a legendary peer. Beach Boy Brian Wilson, one of music's greatest vocal arrangers, was in awe of "Bohemian Rhapsody," which he described as "the most competitive thing that's come along in ages." He was so impressed, he reportedly worked out every last note for his own pleasure and edification. ■

JOY TO THE WORLD

HOW *WAYNE'S WORLD* PUT "RHAPSODY" BACK ON THE MAP.

• When "Bohemian Rhapsody" was released in 1975, it became a ubiquitous international hit. But by the early 1990s it had been relegated to the dustbin of history, occasionally making an appearance on Queen compilations or popping up here and there on classic rock radio.

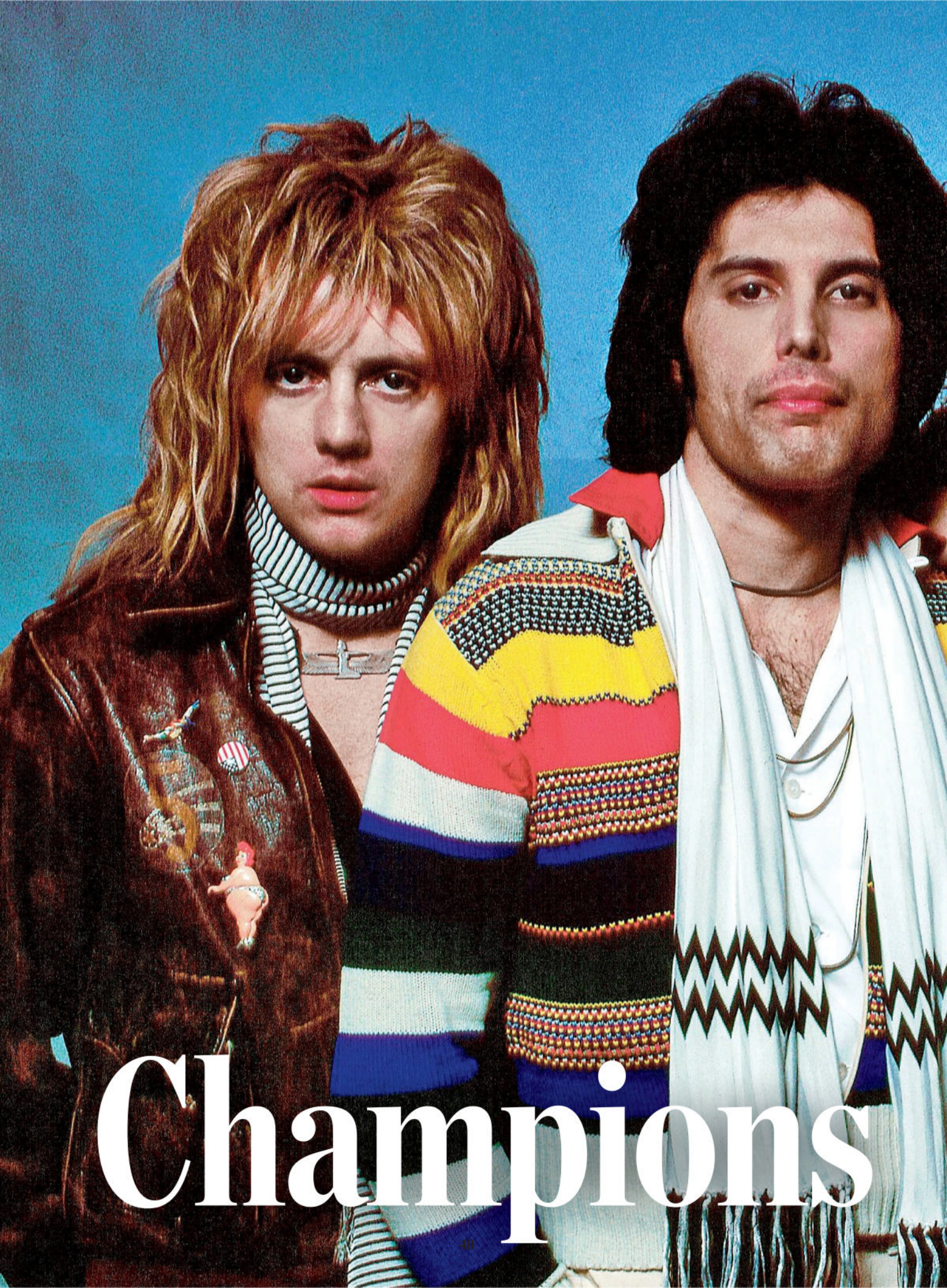
Then, in 1992, actor Mike Myers featured the song in his hit film *Wayne's World*, in which Wayne and his heavy-metal-loving friends hilariously headbang to the song's climactic ending.

Thanks to the movie's enormous success, "Bohemian Rhapsody" once again became a monster hit, eventually rising to No. 2 on the pop charts. The song's resurrection and popularity was a fitting, if unintentional, farewell tribute to Freddie Mercury, who had died of AIDS less than three months before the film's release.

"I wanted it to reflect a kind of time in your life before you had to do adult things and pay taxes and all that stuff," Myers told *Rolling Stone* in 2015.

The scene became a cultural touchstone, but the irony is that the song almost didn't make it into the film. Both producer Lorne Michaels and director Penelope Spheeris preferred using a Guns N' Roses song, but Myers didn't see anything funny about that band's music, while he felt that "Bohemian Rhapsody" was inherently comedic. "At one point I said to everybody, 'I'm out.' I don't want to make this movie if it's not 'Bohemian Rhapsody.'"

Queen also saw the humor in Myers' treatment of the song. "Mike gave me a videotape that I took around to Freddie," said Brian May. "He was really sick by that time, but he just laughed and thought it was great."



Champions

Queen give the camera a little attitude in 1977. They were not about to relinquish their crown to a bunch of punk rockers.

QUEEN STOOD UP TO THE STYLISTIC AND POPULAR CHALLENGES POSED BY PUNK ROCK BY SHIFTING GEARS ON *NEWS OF THE WORLD*, AND THEY CAPTURED THE HEARTS AND EARS OF A NEW GENERATION IN THE PROCESS.

of the World

"We'd already made a decision that after *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races*, we wanted to go back to the basics for *News of the World*."

—BRIAN MAY

A Day at the Races, recorded in 1976, was a companion piece to the band's previous album, *A Night at the Opera*, with both taking their names from Marx Brothers films and featuring related musical themes and similar packaging.

The well-crafted fifth studio album was a gigantic success that contained two of Queen's most beloved songs, "Somebody to Love" and "Tie Your Mother Down." But to Queen it sounded perhaps a bit too much like *Opera* and lacked the freshness and innovative spirit fans had come to expect from the band. The two albums made them one of the biggest rock groups in the world, but Queen, a little weary of their heavily produced formula, wisely chose to record their next album more spontaneously. The decision to change direction was also influenced by the rise of punk rock in England, most notably the Sex Pistols, who sparked a backlash against the highly polished rock that was Queen's stock-in-trade.

We Will Rock You

It's often been said that Queen never did things in half measures, and it didn't get more basic or punk than the opening track on 1977's *News of the World*, the group's sixth studio release. Featuring a hypnotic

To promote their album *A Day at the Races*, Queen enjoys a day at Kempton Park Racecourse in Surrey, England, on Sept. 23, 1976.

Critical reaction to *News of the World* was initially mixed, with many reviewers commenting on the band's change in style. However, it has since come to be regarded as one of Queen's greatest albums.

accompaniment that consisted of only foot-stomping and hand-clapping, "We Will Rock You" became one of the group's biggest songs ever thanks to that rhythm, which proved a brilliant way of getting live audiences to instantly join in en masse. But Brian May wrote it also to demonstrate that Queen could come up with an enormous hit without relying on heavy production and elaborate studio overdubs.

A NIGHT AT THE BALLET

QUEEN'S FRONTMAN ALWAYS WANTED TO DANCE, AND IN 1979 HE GOT HIS WISH.

• **Freddie Mercury once** told a journalist he wanted to take ballet lessons, which made sense not only because he'd always longed to dance, but that familiarizing himself with the steps would serve the graceful flourishes he employed as Queen's frontman.

"It would be nice if I could study some of the routines or exercises, so I would know how to put them across onstage," he said at the time. "At the moment, what I do is mock ballet..."

He got his chance in October 1979. Encouraged by his friend Wayne Eagling, a choreographer and principal dancer for The Royal Ballet, Freddie trained for a benefit performance at the London Coliseum to raise money for handicapped children. The singer took his training seriously, though he described the experience as "agonizing."

"They had me practicing at the barre," he said, "trying to do things in a week that they'd been doing for years. It was murder... hurting me in places I didn't know I had."

At the benefit, Freddie danced and sang "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," and was tossed around by the ballet troupe. Roger Taylor described the performance, a sold-out success, as "brave and hilarious." Eagling later choreographed the Queen video "I Want to Break Free," which was based on the ballet *Afternoon of a Faun*. Freddie mimicked the performance by the star of the work's original 1912 production, Vaslav Nijinsky, perhaps the greatest ballet dancer of the early 20th century.

"We Will Rock You" was a bold statement, but its follow-up single was even more so. "We Are the Champions" could've easily been misinterpreted as the most brazen self-pat on the back in the history of pop music, but listeners quickly understood that the "we" in the title included them too.

"We wanted to get the crowds waving and singing," May explained. "'We Are the Champions' was very unifying and positive."

Noted Freddie with a laugh: "'We Are the Champions' is the most arrogant song I've ever written. I was thinking about football when I wrote it—something everyone could sing along to.... It worked like a treat! I suppose you could think of it as my version of [Frank Sinatra's] 'My Way.'"

Interestingly, in 2011, a team of scientific researchers concluded that the song was the catchiest in the history of pop music, and anyone who listened to it repeatedly when it was released would probably concur. Thanks to its enormous popularity, *News of the World* became one of Queen's biggest albums, selling over 10 million copies—in effect turning the band into world champions.

Much as *A Day at the Races* was a sequel to *A Night at the Opera*, the band's next album, *Jazz*, released in 1978, was a continuation of *News of the World*. Other than Freddie's amusing, campy "Bicycle Race," which features several key modulations and time changes, the album was filled with lean rockers like "Dead on Time," "If You Can't Beat Them" and May's wonderfully playful hit "Fat Bottomed Girls."

While *Jazz* didn't attain the dizzying heights of *News of the World* in terms of sales and cultural impact, it sold more than 5 million copies worldwide. The two records made it clear that Queen had met the challenge posed by punk and emerged not only unscathed but even more popular and innovative than ever. Characteristically, they followed those triumphs by laying the groundwork for yet another drastic change in direction. ■

"'We Are the Champions' was written as a winning song for everyone."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

Freddie, in 1978, ditches the spandex in favor of a bit of leather boy chic. It was the beginning of a new era of style for the singer.

Stone Cold Crazy

TO CELEBRATE THE RELEASE OF *JAZZ*, FREDDIE MERCURY AND QUEEN THREW THE WILDEST PARTY IN THE HISTORY OF ROCK 'N' ROLL.

In October 1978, Queen decided to throw a Halloween party to mark the release of their upcoming album, *Jazz*. And what better place to do it than New Orleans, their favorite American city and the actual birthplace of jazz music?

Queen was never a band that did things halfway, and after the success of their previous three albums, its members were in a particularly expansive mood—especially Freddie Mercury. Their management budgeted a whopping $200,000 for the once-in-a-lifetime soiree, which was held in the spacious Fairmont Hotel in the center of the city's French Quarter. But when costs for food, liquor and entertainment started spiraling out of control, Freddie told everyone, "F--- the cost, darlings, let us live a little."

Queen, preceded in traditional New Orleans fashion by a brass marching band, arrived at the stroke of midnight. After their entrance, a legion of strippers dressed as nuns, snake charmers, drag queens, fire-eaters and scantily clad waiters and waitresses followed, confounding the guests—400 dumbstruck journalists, record company execs, friends and fans who'd never seen anything like it. The tables were laden with pyramids of food and champagne while dwarfs wandered through carrying trays of cocaine.

Some have dubbed it the greatest party in rock history. According to record executive Joe Smith, "It was definitely a Freddie party. He was testing the limits of what he could get away with."

Brian May concurred. As reports of the bash began leaking out the next day, the guitarist told the press, "It was deliberately excessive...partly for our own enjoyment and partly for the hell of it." ■

1

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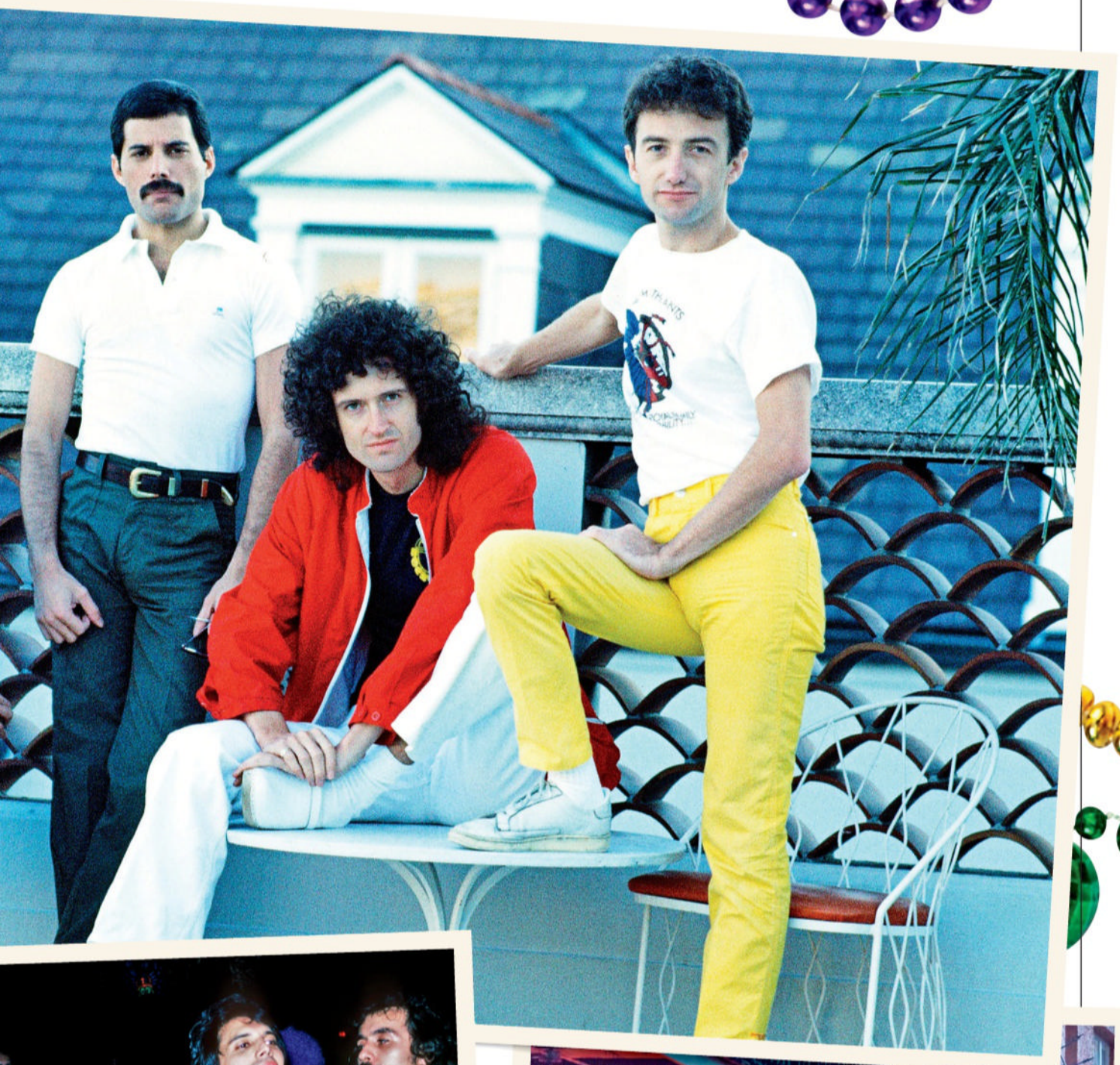
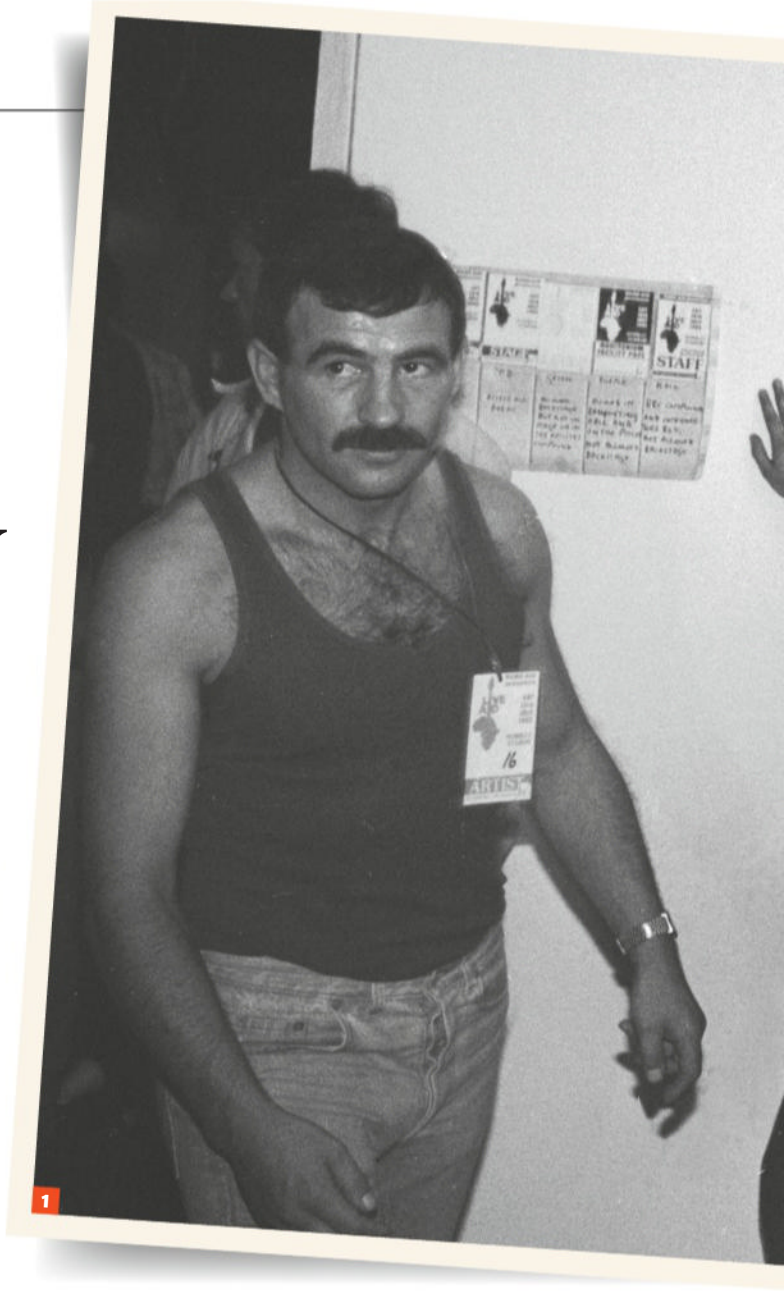
1. Queen, here in New Orleans on Sept. 21, 1981, prepare for a forthcoming tour of South America. **2.** In October 1978, the band enjoys arguably the most decadent party in rock history. They reportedly spent a quarter-million dollars on the bash, which was held in New Orleans' French Quarter. **3.** The wild streets of the Big Easy.



JAZZ
FUNERAL
"WHERE PEOPLE ARE DYING TO COME IN"
BIG EASY
DAIQUIRIS
PIZZA
DAIQUIRIS & COLD BEER

Good Company

QUEEN'S FRONTMAN HAD MANY LOVERS DURING HIS BRIEF LIFE. HERE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THEM.



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Who were the greatest loves of Freddie Mercury's life? Most would agree that it was two people—Mary Austin (see page 15) and, later, Jim Hutton, who had a seven-year relationship with the entertainer that ended with the singer's death in 1991. But Freddie had other lovers, too. Here are some of the most significant, including Austin and Hutton.

DAVID MINNS
(1975–1978)

During the last year of Freddie's relationship with Austin in early 1975, music industry costume and wardrobe manager David Minns became his first serious boyfriend. They were a couple for approximately three years, during which they lived together in an apartment bought by Freddie.

The singer carefully kept his homosexuality a secret from his parents and the public, so he and Minns never dated openly. Minns later said that Freddie's constant fear of exposure affected his mental health and led to the end of their relationship in 1978. It's believed that Minns inspired Freddie to write "You Take My Breath Away" and "Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy."

JOE FANELLI
(1978–1980)

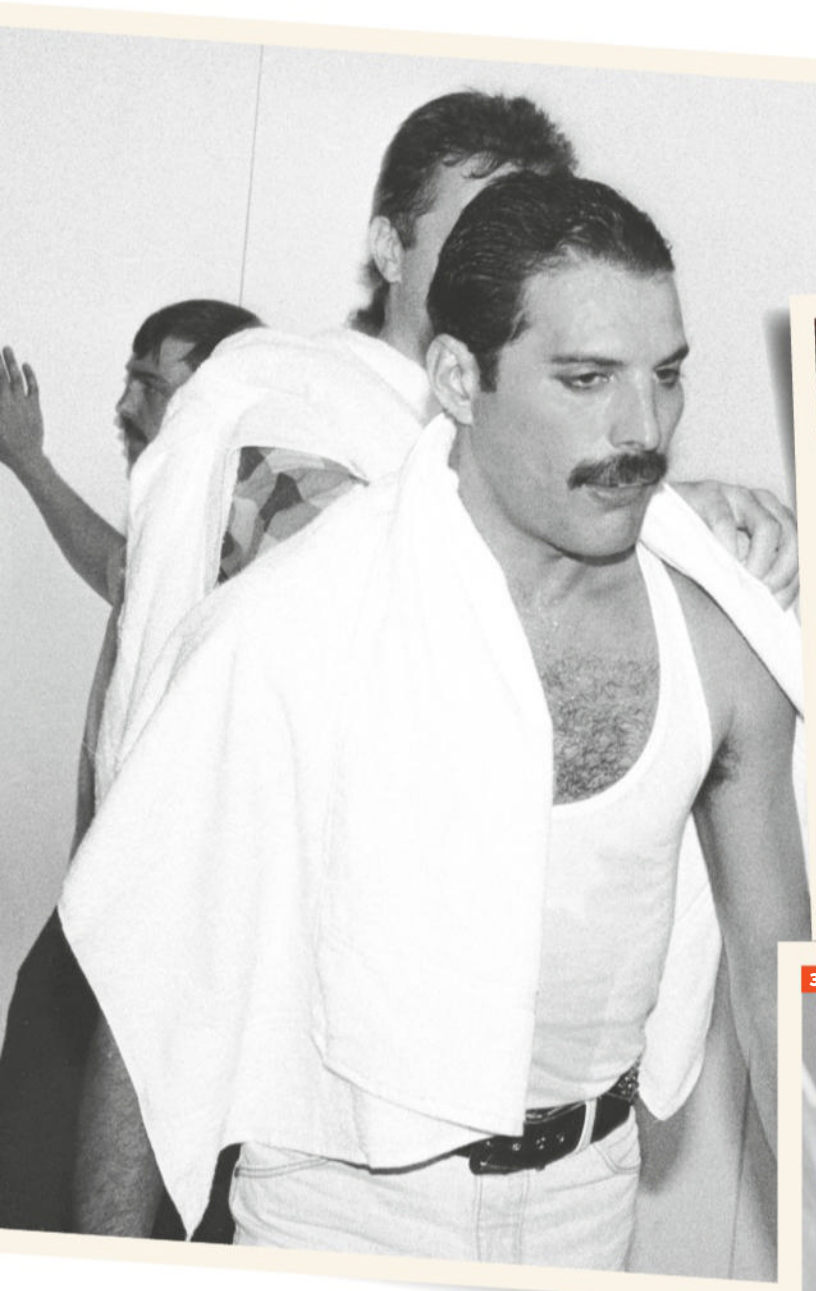
In 1978 Freddie met gourmet chef Joe Fanelli in the U.S., where they became lovers. Fanelli traveled to England to be with the singer but broke up with him, unable to deal with the pressure of constantly having to hide their relationship. The pair remained friends, however, and several years after they parted ways, Freddie hired him to be his live-in personal chef.

Fanelli moved into Freddie's sprawling home at Garden Lodge in London while the singer was with his longtime partner Jim Hutton. In the summer of 1990 came the awful news that all three were HIV-positive.

Fanelli nursed Freddie in his final days and was in the house when he died. Tragically, Fanelli also passed away from an AIDS-related illness just months after Freddie.

BILL REID
(1982)

Perhaps Freddie's most fraught relationship was with Bill Reid, a stocky gay man from New Jersey. The pair met one night in a Manhattan bar. Violent and abusive, Reid once injured Freddie's hand by biting him so



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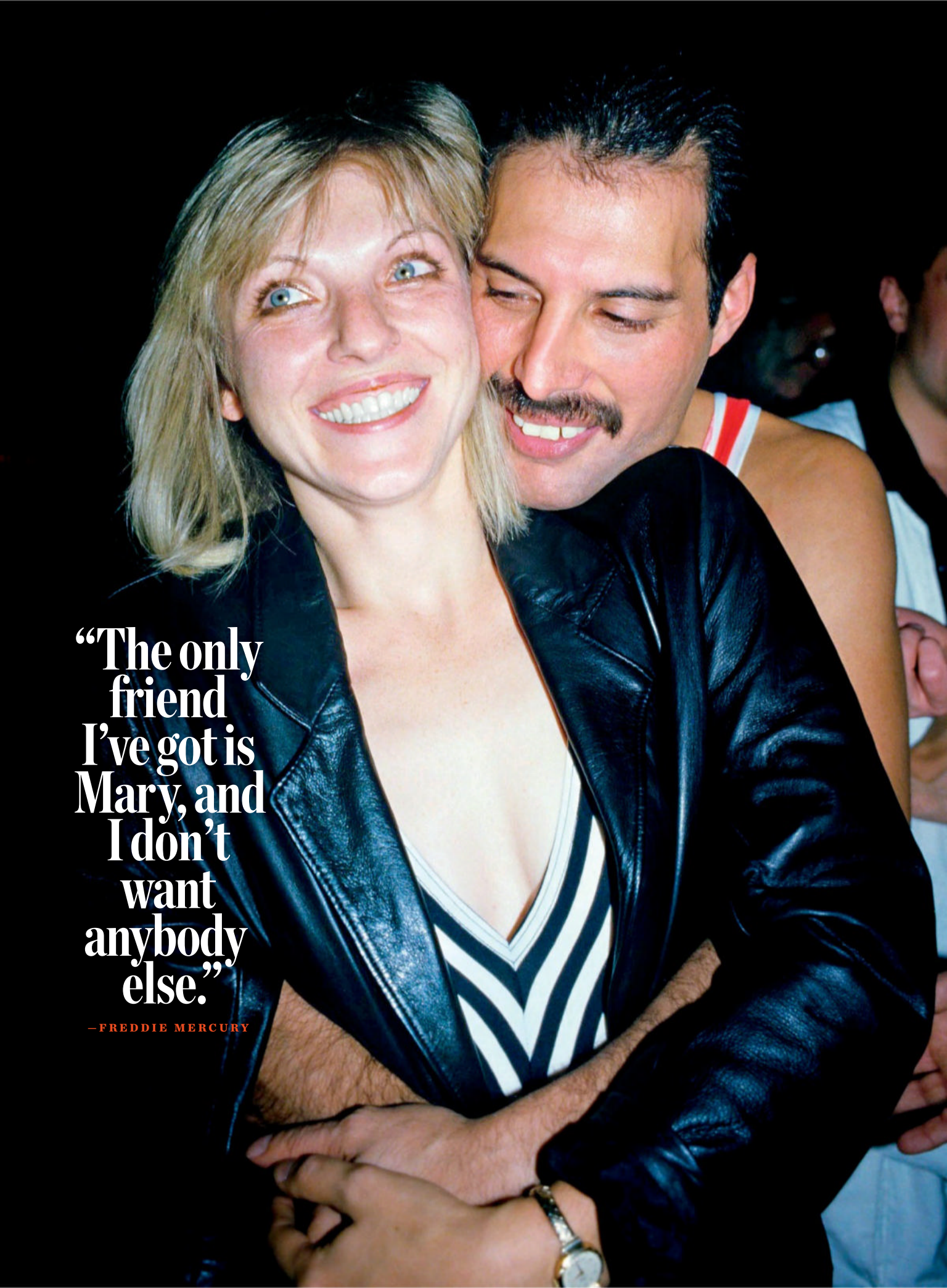
badly that the singer's friend Peter Freestone wanted to drive him to a hospital.

In September 1982, hours before Queen was scheduled to perform on *Saturday Night Live*, Freddie woke up so hoarse from arguing with Reid that he spent the day drinking tea with lemon and honey in an attempt to recover in time for the show. He was convinced that he'd be unable to perform, in the process badly letting his band down. At the last minute, however, Freddie rallied and managed to deliver a show-stopping performance. Reid, too, was a victim of AIDS.

WINNIE KIRCHBERGER
(1983–1985)

Freddie fell deeply in love with German restaurateur Winnie Kirchberger and during their three-year romance bought him an apartment, a car and an expensive ring, and referred to him as "husband" to their friends. The couple moved in together in Munich,

1. Jim Hutton joins Freddie Mercury backstage at the Live Aid concert at Wembley Stadium in 1985. **2.** Freddie sits on the steps of a gay bar in Ibiza with pal Barbara Valentin (far left) and Winnie Kirchberger. **3.** Freddie with Bill Reid in 1982 in Japan. The couple had a difficult relationship and Freddie dumped Reid after a major fight on the day before Queen appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, an appearance that would be the band's last in America before the singer's death in 1991.



"The only friend I've got is Mary, and I don't want anybody else."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

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and pals said their relationship was Freddie's first experience of domestic bliss as a relatively ordinary couple. Kirchberger, however, struggled with his English, and they eventually broke up, reportedly due in part to their difficulty in communicating. Like Freddie, Kirchberger died of AIDS.

JIM HUTTON
(1985–1991)

Freddie's longest romantic relationship—about seven years—was with hairdresser Jim Hutton. He and Freddie weren't married, but both wore wedding rings to show their commitment to each other. Hutton moved in with Freddie at the singer's Garden Lodge home soon after they began dating and remained by his side right up to the singer's passing.

Freddie called him his "husband" and when he was diagnosed with AIDS, he offered to let Hutton go—to which he replied, "I love you, Freddie, I'm not going anywhere." Their relationship was an open secret in the media, but Freddie was unable to admit that he was gay to his parents, even telling them his "friend" slept in a different room. But, suspecting there was more to it than just friendship, Freddie's mother, Jer Bulsara, wrote Hutton a letter after her son died to thank him for loving her child.

MARY AUSTIN
(1969–1991)

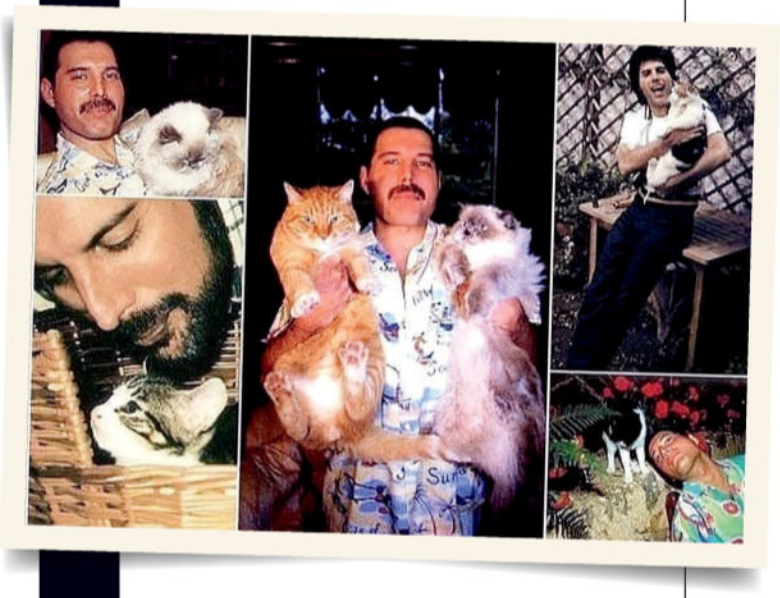
When Freddie died in 1991 of AIDS-related bronchial pneumonia at age 45, Mary Austin was by his side as she had been for much of his adult life. At one point in their relationship he had asked her to marry him, and when he passed away, he left her half of his reported $75 million estate, including the 28-room London mansion in which he died and Austin still lives in to this day.

They met when Freddie was 24 and Austin was 19, but six years into their relationship their romance began to cool due largely to the singer's evolving sexual feelings toward men. "I told him, 'Something is going on and I just feel like a noose around your neck,'" she recalled. "'I think it's time for me to go.'" Despite the end of their physical relationship, Austin continued to maintain her close friendship with Freddie and remained arguably the most important person in his life. Austin, however, made her own path and had two sons with painter Piers Cameron. She, however, reportedly worked for Queen's management company and was a constant in the years leading up to Freddie's death.

"He kept her close by when he became ill," said Mark Blake, author of *Is This the Real Life?: The Untold Story of Freddie Mercury and Queen*. "He effectively left a lot to her as if he was leaving it to his widow. Mary was good at keeping him grounded. She had been there before the money, before the fame and she was there at the end." ■

THE CAT'S MEOW

FREDDIE MERCURY'S OTHER BEST FRIENDS? HIS 10 CATS.



• **How deeply did** Freddie Mercury love his cats? His longtime assistant Peter Freestone told the *Washington Post* that the singer would often call home while on the road just to speak to them or hear their meows.

"His cats were his family," said Freestone.

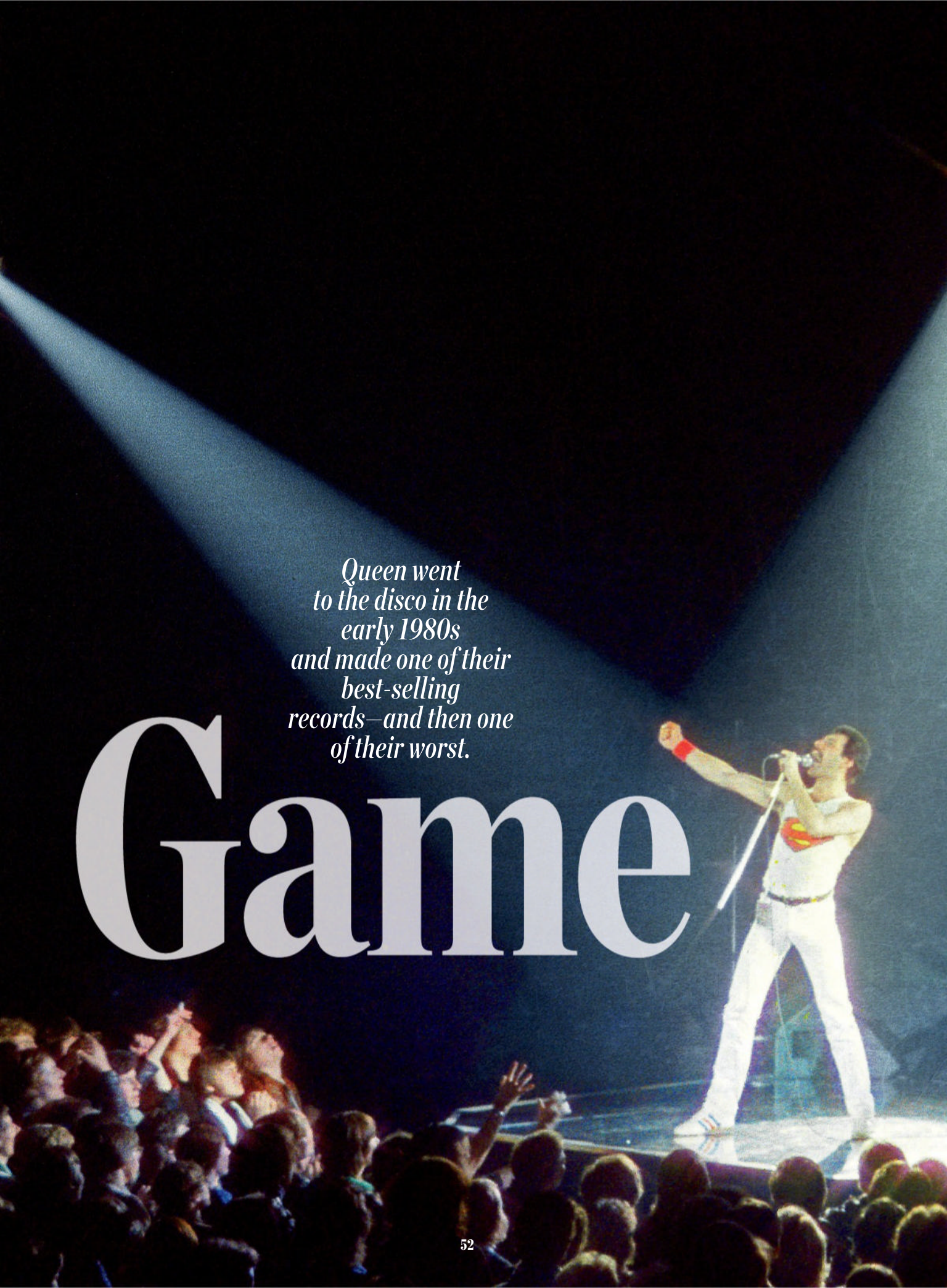
Throughout his life, the singer owned at least 10 felines. Dorothy, Tiffany, Tom, Jerry, Delilah, Goliath, Lily, Miko, Oscar and Romeo all outlived their master. While Tiffany was a purebred cat given to Freddie by Mary Austin, the rest were adopted from shelters or veterinary hospitals "to save their lives."

Some of the animals were immortalized on albums. In the liner notes to his solo effort, *Mr. Bad Guy*, Freddie wrote: "This album is dedicated to my cat Jerry—also Tom, Oscar and Tiffany, and all the cat lovers across the universe—screw everybody else!"

His last album with Queen included a song about one of his favorite tabbies, "Delilah." Tender but hilarious, it included lines like "You make me so very happy/When you cuddle up and go to sleep beside me/And then you make me slightly mad/When you pee all over my Chippendale suite." In one of his final interviews, the singer told writer David Wigg that in his will, he made accommodations for his fuzzy pals, his greatest loves, by "leaving it all to Mary and the cats."

Queen went to the disco in the early 1980s and made one of their best-selling records—and then one of their worst.

Game



Changer

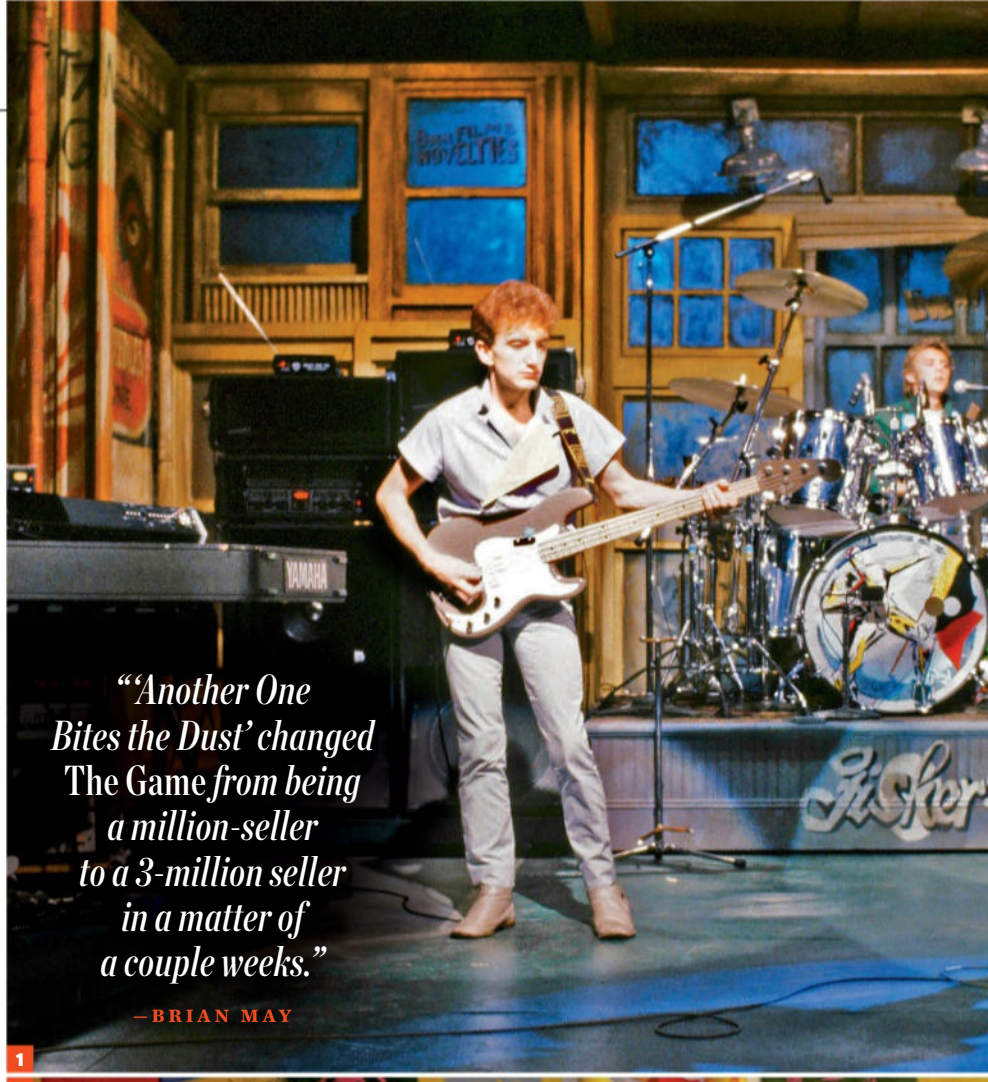
The band performs in London in 1980 during The Game Tour, which supported Queen's only album to reach No. 1 in the U.S.

It seemed like every two albums Queen would alter their sound in some significant way to keep their music fresh and their audience engaged; *The Game*, released in 1980, fit the pattern perfectly. To eliminate any chance of sliding into old habits, Queen recorded it in Musicland Studios in Munich, where they worked with a new engineer, Reinhold Mack (who went by the name "Mack"), and all-new technology.

"We were trying to get outside of what was normal for us," recalled Brian May. "We hired Mack and worked in a new environment—everything was different. We turned our whole studio technique around in a sense, because the engineer had come from a different background from [ours]. We thought there was only one way of doing things, like doing a backing track: We would just do it until we got it right. The problem with that is when you're performing something too many times it gets stiff.

"Mack's first contribution," May added, "was to say, 'Well, you don't have to do that. I can drop the whole thing in. If it breaks down after half a minute, then we can edit in and carry on if you just play along with the tempo.' We laughed and said, 'Don't be silly. You can't do that.' But in fact, you can. What you gain is the freshness, because often a lot of the backing tracks are first takes."

It was a good time to get loose and funky. Disco and Black dance music dominated the airwaves, and it was natural that the band would want to explore these styles. Surprisingly, it was the shy, unassuming bassist, John Deacon, who led the charge with his new song "Another One Bites the Dust," on which he played most of the instruments, including bass, piano, rhythm and lead guitar. "I listened to a lot of soul when I was in school," he said. "I've always been interested in that sort of music.



"'Another One Bites the Dust' changed The Game *from being a million-seller to a 3-million seller in a matter of a couple weeks."*

—BRIAN MAY

1

2

1. Queen performs "Under Pressure" on *Saturday Night Live* in 1982. **2.** Queen attends a *Hot Space* album release party in New York City in July 1982. **3.** Producer Reinhold Mack at Musicland Studios in Munich.

'PRESSURE' COOKING

THE STORY BEHIND QUEEN'S SPECTACULAR COLLABORATION WITH THEIR FRIEND DAVID BOWIE.

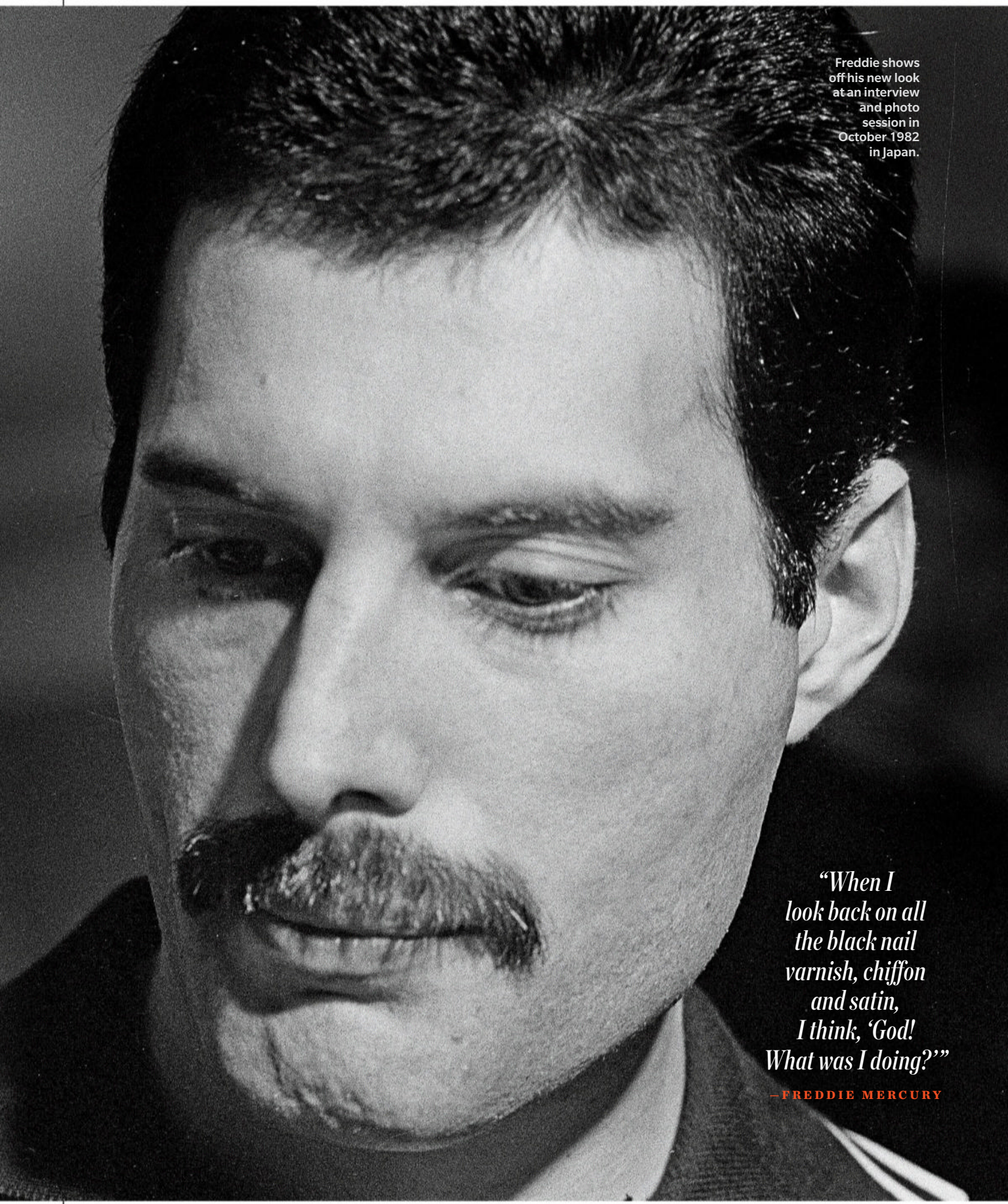
• **In 1979, Queen** bought Mountain Studio in Montreux, Switzerland, for its "exceptional geographical situation, a highly qualified staff and top-quality technical facilities." While it seemed like an extravagance, it saved them money in recording expenses and functioned as a tax shelter.

Around that time, one of Queen's heroes, David Bowie, also lived in Montreux. "David was living in Switzerland; he basically just popped in to see us," Brian May told journalist Alan di Perna. "We all had a little chat and then went straight in the studio and started messing around. We played a few old songs and then something new started to happen, and we said, 'Okay, let's try and record this.'"

The musicians quickly completed an instrumental backing track but were at a loss for what to do for the vocal. Bowie proposed a rather unusual idea: He asked each member of the band to write some ideas for lyrics without conferring with each other. Then he suggested that each person enter the vocal booth and improvise a melody for the song off the top of their heads. His plan was to take bits from everyone and create a vocal line and words for the song. "It was truly a spontaneous thing," said May. "[David] was kind of famous for writing lyrics by collecting different bits of paper with sentence fragments on them from different sources. And that's what we did. Some of the original bits even made it onto the record. Freddie's scat singing stuff was part of the initial track. Odd, isn't it? That's why the words are so curious."

Bizarre as Bowie's method was, "Under Pressure" became a classic, charting in the Top 10 in almost a dozen countries. It was also voted the second-best collaboration of all time in a *Rolling Stone* poll.

"David took the reins and decided that he wanted to rationalize the lyrics and make them say what he felt they should," said May. "It was hard because you had four very precocious boys and David, who was precocious enough for all of us."



Freddie shows off his new look at an interview and photo session in October 1982 in Japan.

"When I look back on all the black nail varnish, chiffon and satin, I think, 'God! What was I doing?'"

—FREDDIE MERCURY

Michael Jackson used to come to our shows. He suggested we release it as a single. Some Black radio stations in the U.S. started playing it, which never happened before."

May laughs at the memory of the normally docile Deacon asserting his sense of how the disco song should sound, even when he was getting pushback from the band.

"We were going for the big drum sound—you know, quite pompous in our usual way," said May. "But Deakey said, 'No, I want this to be totally different: It's going to be a very tight drum sound.' It was originally done to a drum loop—[these were] the days before drum machines. Roger [Taylor] did a loop, under protest, because he didn't like the sound of the drums recorded that way. And then Deakey put this groove down. Immediately Freddie became violently enthusiastic and said, 'This is it! This is important! I'm going to spend a lot of time on this.' And it was the beginning of something quite big for us."

The record was, indeed, a smash. It crossed over and reached No. 2 on the Hot Soul Singles chart and the Disco Top 100 chart. Because of its appeal to both rock and R&B fans it became Queen's most commercially successful single ever, with sales of more than 7 million copies internationally.

In some ways, Queen's follow-up single, "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," a neo-rockabilly tune penned by Freddie Mercury, was equally surprising. It certainly was a smash, hitting No. 1 on both the U.K. and U.S. charts, the first time a Queen single made it to the top in America.

Hot Space...Cool Reception

Emboldened by the unprecedented success of "Another One Bites the Dust," Freddie pushed Queen to

On their 1982 album *Hot Space*, Queen employed many elements of disco, funk, rhythm and blues, dance and pop music.

DON'T STOP ME NOW

THE DAY FREDDIE WENT TO THE BARBER.

• At the dawn of the 1980s, Freddie Mercury knew it was time to make adjustments to his image. Punk and disco had already impacted rock 'n'roll in ways big and small, and Queen's once-groundbreaking glam-rock look was becoming antiquated. The group was still wildly popular, but the singer understood he had to change with the times if he wanted his group to stay on top.

While touring Argentina, Freddie decided to get a haircut and had his people reach out to a respected stylist, Miguel Romano. Romano didn't know much about Freddie or Queen and offered up some suggestions for the cut.

"He had everything with waves, everything with curls and his hair was below the shoulders," Romano said years later. "I said I don't like it—cut it shorter. Either we make a current, modern cut or I would rather leave your hair long. Let's cut it short, short, short."

Freddie, never one to do things in moderation, rose to Romano's challenge. Photos of Queen's frontman having his long locks shorn show him clearly enjoying himself, perhaps relishing how much controversy he knew it was going to create.

And fans were taken aback when they saw Freddie with his short hair on the cover of Queen's new album, *The Game*, and in the videos for "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" and "Save Me." But most just assumed it was a nod to rock's New Wave. In some ways, Freddie was a little disappointed at what he saw as a tepid reaction, so he took his transformation a step further.

Inspired partly by the trends in San Francisco's gay clubs, he grew a big, bushy mustache and started wearing outfits similar to those of the disco group the Village People.

When he debuted his edgier appearance in the video for "Another One Bites the Dust," the response from fans was immediate and intense. The band's offices were flooded with gifts of razors and bottles of black nail polish from female fans who wanted the old Freddie back.

For his part, Freddie was unrepentant. At one concert he was even heard to say, "Do you like this mustache? A lot of people are hating it—I don't give a f---. It's my mustache and I'm gonna keep it!" Roger Taylor rolled his eyes at the controversy, saying, "Usually, when a man grows a mustache it's not a big deal. But it was in his case. It represented the gay scene at the time. It didn't bother us at all."

make a primarily dance-oriented album. He had been spending a lot of time on the Manhattan scene, and was certain that disco was the future and where Queen should be. The others hesitated. They enjoyed making "Dust" and weren't against doing another song or two like that, but they felt Freddie took it too far.

"The motivation for *Hot Space* came mostly from me," Freddie said. "I seem to remember the rest of the band was skeptical. I wasn't deliberately trying to be difficult, but having spent a lot of time in New York...I just got into that side of things. England totally ignored it. It was obviously not their cup of tea."

And America did more than ignore it—it positively hated *Hot Space*. The majority of U.S. rock fans detested disco and quite frankly despised the new look Freddie had assumed (see sidebar, page 57). Both disco and Freddie's mustache were gay culture signifiers, and decades before the Gay Pride movement began taking hold in the U.S., the sad fact is that most American rock kids wanted nothing to do with either.

Ultimately, the album managed to avoid completely tanking thanks to the inclusion of "Under Pressure" (see sidebar, page 55), Queen's innovative duet with David Bowie. ■

Queen collects gold discs for "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" in the Netherlands.

"'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' took me 10 minutes to write."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

The band, in 1980, takes a break in the recording studio.

THE THRILLER & THE KILLER

MUSIC HISTORY WAS NEARLY MADE...UNTIL THAT DAMN LLAMA.

• **Michael Jackson and** Freddie Mercury had much in common. Both were androgynous, world-famous showmen with astounding four-octave voices who ruled the early '80s stages with supreme confidence and an iron fist. They could've been rivals, but that wasn't in either of their natures. Instead, they became friends.

Jackson first became interested in Freddie after the 1980 release of Queen's *The Game*, which featured the hit "Another One Bites the Dust," a disco-rock song that would serve as a template for many future Jackson hits, including "Beat It," "Dirty Diana," and "Black and White."

"In the early days, three, four years ago, he used to come and see our shows at The Forum in [Los Angeles], and I guess he liked us and so I got to meet him," Freddie told journalist Lisa Robinson in 1983. "He kept coming to see us and then we started talking. He would actually go out to dinner back then," Freddie added with a chuckle.

After the astounding success of his 1982 album *Thriller*, Jackson became something of a recluse. But he and Freddie often spoke on the phone and discussed ways the two might one day collaborate.

The idea of recording a song together and making an accompanying video was irresistible to both men, and they began working on demos for three tracks in Jackson's home studio—"There Must Be More to Life Than This," "State of Shock" and "Victory."

"They were great songs, but the problem was time, as we were both very busy at that period," Freddie recalled.

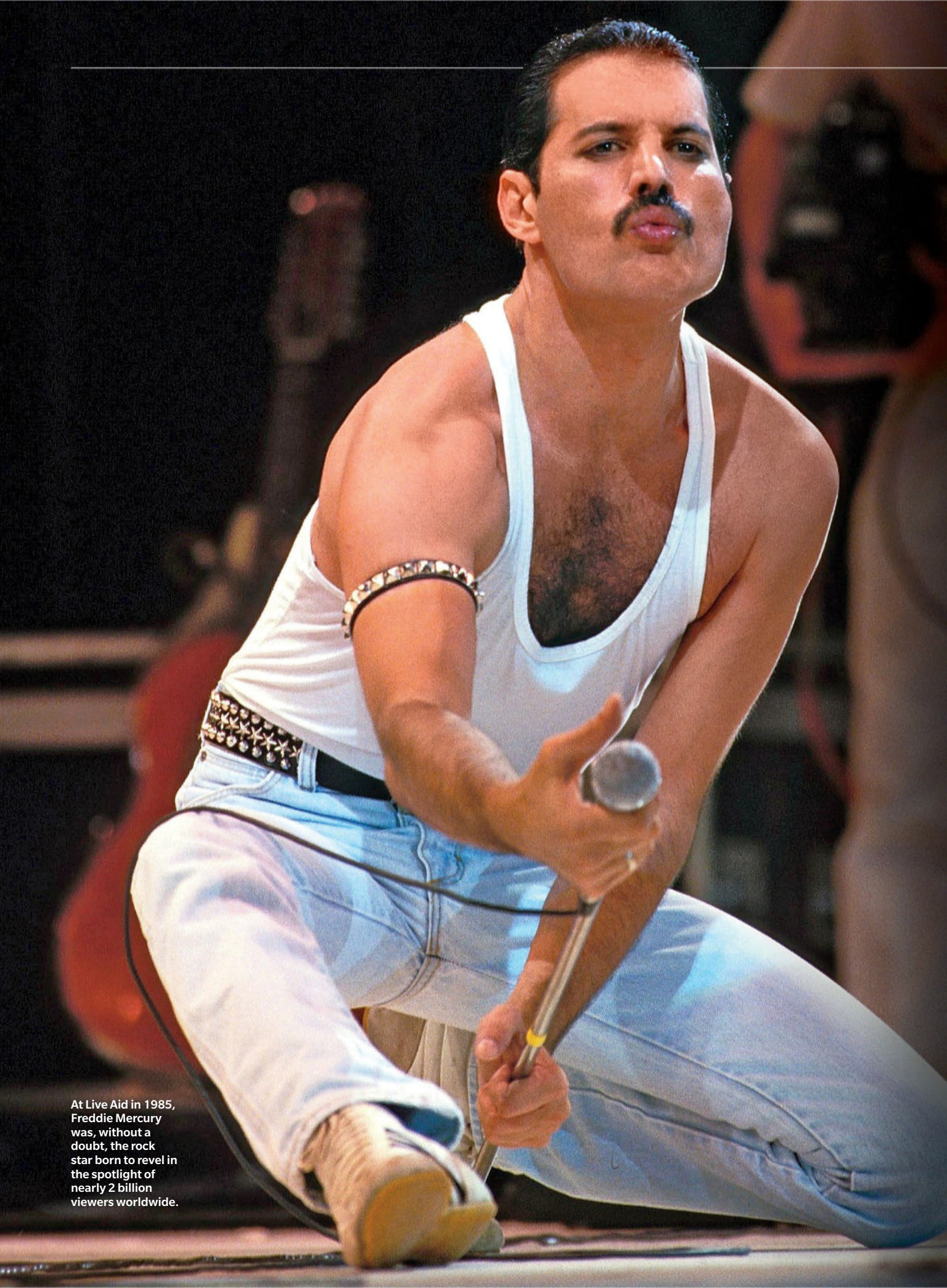
There is some evidence that Freddie was being polite and somewhat protective of his friend's increasingly eccentric behavior. According to Queen's manager Jim Beach, he received a call from Freddie during the demo sessions: "Freddie said, 'You have to get me out of the studio.'"

When the manager asked why, the singer explained, "Because I'm recording with a llama. Michael's bringing his pet llama into the studio every day and I'm really not used to it and I've had enough, and I want to leave."

The story is a good one; it's easy to imagine Freddie fretting about a llama in the studio. But others claim that it was Jackson who halted work on the demos because he wasn't happy with Freddie's use of cocaine in his home.

On the plus side, none of the music went to waste. Jackson went on to record "State of Shock" with Mick Jagger, "There Must Be More to Life Than This" appeared on Freddie's solo album *Mr. Bad Guy*, and "Victory" was the title track of an album Jackson recorded with his brothers.

Whatever really happened, Freddie was at least a little perturbed by Jackson's self-isolation. "That's not me," he sniffed, "but that's his bag."



At Live Aid in 1985, Freddie Mercury was, without a doubt, the rock star born to revel in the spotlight of nearly 2 billion viewers worldwide.

Queen for a Day

The band was able to reclaim their crown as the world's greatest live rockers at the legendary 1985 benefit concert Live Aid.

Queen's breathtaking performance at Live Aid may have clocked in at only 21 minutes, but every astounding second made rock history and transformed the band for good.

In October 1984, images of thousands of people starving to death were broadcast throughout the U.K. in an unflinching BBC News report about a massive famine sweeping Ethiopia. The BBC News crew described the situation as "the closest thing to hell on Earth." The stark footage shocked Britain's citizens to their core, including Bob Geldof, lead singer of the popular British rock group The Boomtown Rats.

Geldof was so overwhelmed by what he'd seen that he reached out to Midge Ure, leader of the band Ultravox, who had also seen the report. They quickly wrote a song together about the disaster engulfing Ethiopia, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" The pair enlisted some of rock's greatest stars—including U2's Bono, Phil Collins, George Michael, Sting, Boy George and Simon Le Bon of Duran Duran—to record the single together under the banner of Band Aid.

"Do They Know It's Christmas?" was released in December and stayed at No. 1 for five weeks in the U.K. Geldof and Ure had hoped that the song would raise £70,000 pounds. The actual amount was closer to an astounding £8 million.

Boy George, the lead singer of Culture Club, was so thrilled and inspired by the record's success that he encouraged Geldof to keep the effort going by perhaps staging a charity concert. The latter embraced the idea and ran with it.

"The show should be as big as humanly possible," he told the U.K. magazine *Melody Maker* in January 1985. "There's no point in just 5,000 fans turning up at Wembley Stadium in London; we need to have Wembley linked with Madison Square Garden in New York, and the whole show should be televised worldwide. It would be great for Duran Duran to play three or four numbers at Wembley, and then flick to the U.S. where Bruce Springsteen would be playing. While he's on, the Wembley stage could be made ready for the next British act."

As fans will remember, what came to be called Live Aid hewed very closely to Geldof's original vision. On July 13, 1985, the benefit concert he organized was held simultaneously at Wembley Stadium in London, before an audience of about 72,000, and John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia (a much larger venue than Madison Square Garden), which was filled to capacity with 89,000 rock fans. The dual shows featured the biggest names in rock—among them David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Madonna, Elton John, a reunited Led Zeppelin, the Who, the Beach Boys and Duran Duran—and was broadcast to an estimated 1.9 billion people, nearly 40 percent of the world's population, in 150 nations.

Some of the performers played well (David Bowie, Madonna, U2) while others were clearly underrehearsed (Dylan, Led Zeppelin). But one band ruled the day: Queen. The 21-minute set by Freddie Mercury, Brian May, John Deacon and Roger Taylor has been

1. Boomtown Rats singer and Live Aid visionary Bob Geldof. **2.** Over 72,000 fans go wild over Queen's performance at Wembley Stadium in the U.K. Tickets for the historic show were only $35, with a few VIP seats going for a meager $50. **3.** Rock royalty David Bowie (left) with Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor at Live Aid, behind real royals Princess Diana and Prince Charles.

LIVE AID
FEED THE WORLD
JULY 13th 1985 at WEMBLEY STADI
LIVE AID
LIVE AID

universally hailed as one of the greatest live performances in the history of rock.

While most of the circumstances surrounding the performance depicted in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the 2018 movie about Queen's triumph, were entirely fabricated to create more drama, one thing it did get right was that the band totally killed it.

Heavyweight Champions

Geldof originally approached Freddie about Queen appearing at Live Aid through Spike Edney, a former member of Geldof's band. He had recently joined Queen to play keyboards at the group's live shows. Legend has it that Geldof's invitation ran along the lines of, "Tell the old f----t [which Freddie found hilarious] it's going to be the biggest thing ever..."

Queen was noncommittal, but not because, as is suggested in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, they had split from Freddie for several years. The group was simply exhausted after a spring 1985 tour of New Zealand, Australia and Japan.

"We're going to do bits of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' [but] basically, you're not trying to put across your new material," Freddie told the press of Queen's approach to their Live Aid set. "You're playing songs that people identify with, [to] just make it a happy occasion. It's not a promotional thing, it's a thing where you just have to sit back and think what you can do."

"I'm quite a generous person. If I can do anything in my little way, I do it."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

ROCKET QUEEN

ELTON REMEMBERS FREDDIE.

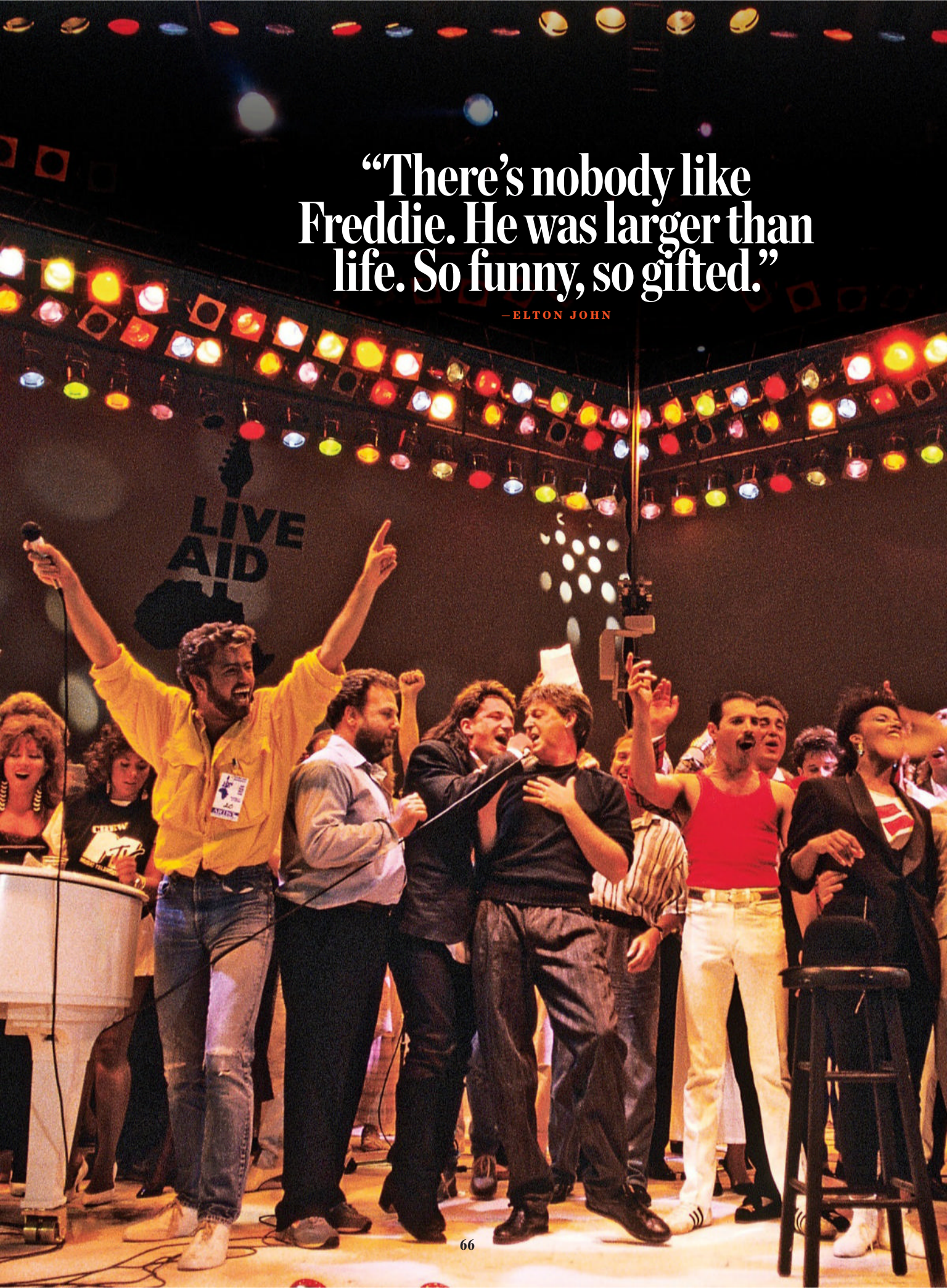
• **Elton John was** never shy about his admiration for Freddie Mercury. "He had such an incredible mind. [Freddie] was one of the funniest people I've ever met and was wonderful to spend time with," John (with Freddie and singer-actor Peter Straker, above) said about his equally flamboyant friend.

Both men loved to gossip, and they often affectionately teased each other with nicknames based on their "drag queen alter egos." Freddie called Elton "Sharon," and Elton would address him as "Melina" after Melina Mercouri, the dusky Greek actress whose last name resembled Mercury's.

Nothing was off-limits—not even backstage at the historic Live Aid concert in 1985 where both performed to thunderous ovations. But while the Rocket Man was terrific, history shows that Queen won the day.

"Backstage at Live Aid, I had a huge area that I kind of decorated," John told *The Guardian* years later. "I made sure there were seats for everyone, so that people who were playing could sit down and have a [chat]. Freddie came over after Queen had stolen the show. I said, 'Freddie, nobody should go on after you—you were magnificent.' He said, 'You're absolutely right, darling, we were—we killed them.' He was so excited.

"Then he said, 'You, on the other hand, dear—you looked like the f---ing Queen Mother when you were onstage. Where did you get that absolutely awful hat?' That was Freddie. He was hilarious," John recalled. "Even when he was dying, he was exactly the same. He was lying in bed, too weak to stand, losing his sight, going, 'Have you heard Mrs. Bowie's new album, darling? What does she think she's doing?'"



"There's nobody like Freddie. He was larger than life. So funny, so gifted."

—ELTON JOHN

Once Freddie and his bandmates were convinced of the show's importance and epic scale, Queen agreed to play an early evening slot at 6:40 p.m. And they took the show more seriously than many of their peers, rehearsing for three solid days.

It was Geldof who best summed up the power of Queen's performance. "[They] were absolutely the best band of the day," he remembered. "They played the best, had the best sound, used their time to the full. They understood the idea exactly, that it was a global jukebox. They just went and smashed one hit after another. It was the perfect stage for Freddie—the whole world. And he could prance about onstage doing 'We Are the Champions.' How perfect could it get?"

The tight performance covered the breadth of the band's catalog, cramming a whole concert's worth of highlights, old and new, into an abbreviated set that included "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Radio Ga Ga," "Hammer to Fall," "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" and the finales "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions."

"It was," guitarist May said later, "the greatest day of our lives. But it was entirely down to Freddie. The rest of us played okay, but Freddie was out there and took it to another level." ■

Singers George Michael, Bono, Paul McCartney, Freddie Mercury and Bob Geldof, among others, take a final bow at the Live Aid concert at Wembley Stadium.

Freddie Mercury poses for a portrait in Japanese music magazine *Music Life*, taken in Tokyo in 1985.

Who's

Bad?

Despite Queen's success at Live Aid, Freddie Mercury's solo album, Mr. Bad Guy, *was a bust and the band fell from grace in America.*

In the early days of Queen, journalists would often ask Freddie Mercury whether he had any aspirations for a solo career. The implication was that a man of his talent and charisma didn't need to share the spotlight with anyone else, not even a group as talented as Queen. While the singer had an outsize ego, he was always careful to impress upon reporters how important his bandmates were to him and his success.

But in the early 1980s, all the members of Queen began entertaining the idea of recording solo albums that would serve as an outlet for ideas they had that didn't fit within the group. Drummer Roger Taylor recorded two albums, *Fun in Space* (1981) and *Strange Frontiers* (1984), and guitarist Brian May released the *Star Fleet Project* (1983), featuring guest guitarist Eddie Van Halen.

But the album that got tongues wagging about the demise of Queen was Freddie's release in 1985 of *Mr. Bad Guy*. When Columbia/CBS Records paid the singer a whopping $4 million for the album, it looked like a harbinger of a serious career change, but Freddie had no intention of leaving his group.

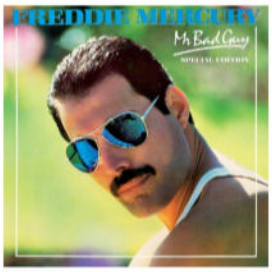
"I was always keen to do a solo album," he said at the time. "I just wanted it to be the right time. I had a lot of ideas bursting to get out and there were a lot of musical territories I wanted to explore, which I really couldn't do within Queen. I wanted to explore reggae rhythms, and I did a couple of tracks with an orchestra. The rest of the band encouraged me to do it.

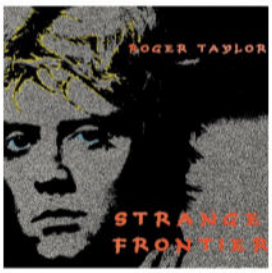
"To be honest," the singer continued, "I would have preferred to have all the band members play on it, but then it wouldn't have been a Freddie Mercury solo album. If it was going to be a genuine side project, they had to

stay out of it, so there was a certain amount of discipline I had to exercise."

Co-produced by Reinhold Mack, *Mr. Bad Guy* was a labor of love, as Freddie took almost two years to choose what kind of music he wanted. Drawing heavily on the disco, dance music and pop influences that had surfaced on Queen's *Hot Space* (1982), it was an accurate reflection of Freddie's evolving tastes in music.

"I don't think Freddie really wanted to go solo," Taylor said. "It's just that he got an awful lot of money from CBS. When it came down to actually doing a solo album, he did sort of miss us. He used to ring me up, and I'd have to fly to Munich to do his background vocals."





THE SOLO ALBUMS
Mr. Bad Guy
(Freddie Mercury/1985)
Star Fleet Project
(Brian May & Friends/1983)
Strange Frontier
(Roger Taylor/1984)

Ultimately, *Mr. Bad Guy* was exactly what it was meant to be, a refreshing side venture. It wasn't a chart success, as it barely cracked the Top 200 in the United States. And it pretty much confirmed what Freddie knew—he needed Queen for commercial balance.

In some ways, the fact that Freddie's solo effort bombed in the U.S. made perfect sense. American rock 'n' roll fans had hated the disco touches on *Hot Space*, and were no more receptive to those on *Mr. Bad Guy*. Freddie had also fallen out of sync with the music mainstream, especially in middle America where disco was dead and rock still ruled.

Queen's next album, *A Kind of Magic*, released in June 1986, was their first since their comeback performance at the 1985 Live Aid concert. It was an immediate hit in the U.K., going straight to No. 1, but North America was still unmoved. While the album marked a return to the group's original rock sound, the damage had been done. The members of Queen were no longer kings in America, and it would be quite some time—decades—before they would reign again. ■

Freddie talks about his first solo album and the first video from it during a May 1985 interview at Hotel Okura in Japan.

The Show Must Go On

Freddie Mercury contracted AIDS, but he wouldn't let the illness destroy his indomitable spirit or desire to create.

For a man who lived much of his life in public and performed on the world's biggest stages, Freddie Mercury had his share of secrets.

The singer almost never discussed his ethnic or religious background with journalists. The closest he came was in response to a question about his outlandish persona: "That's something inbred, it's a part of me. I will always walk around like a Persian popinjay," he said, a reference to his Indian Parsee roots.

Freddie was also coy about his sexuality. It's understandable—homosexual acts between adult males over 21 had been decriminalized in the U.K. only in 1967. But as a person averse to flat-out dishonesty, Freddie would occasionally admit to being bisexual. "I am what I am. So what?" he'd say dismissively. "I've had a lot of lovers, of course," he shared. "I've had more lovers than Liz Taylor! Both male and female. I've tried relationships on either side, but my affairs never seem to last."

In Lesley-Ann Jones' excellent *Mercury: An Intimate Biography of Freddie Mercury*, photographer Mick Rock tried to explain the singer's complex sexuality: "He definitely was gay but not exclusively gay, and that screwed him. He was torn. He loved women. He enjoyed their company immensely. Later in life it may have been predominantly men for sex...he may have been more promiscuous with men, but he loved to get with the girls.

Freddie Mercury had been aware of his HIV-positive diagnosis since 1987, but those around him didn't necessarily have a clue. However, tabloids managed to publish rare photos of Freddie looking scarily gaunt and clearly sick as he further retreated from public life.

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WHY ARE YOU HIDING, FREDDIE?
Fears grow as AIDS doc visits star
POPPYCOCK WORLD OF THE SHODDY SHEIKHS! SEE PAGE 8

THE Sun
BT SCROOGES SCRAP XMAS BONUS
EXCLUSIVE
TOP AIDS DOCS SEE FREDDIE MERCURY
Another Sun exclusive
New fears over star

NEWS OF THE WORLD
£8.50 FOR A GREAT BRITISH HOLIDAY
QUICK! TURN TO PAGE 19
FREDDIE: I'VE GOT AIDS
PICTURE EXCLUSIVE
1763 roses for Terry
Anguish of Queen star

"Mary Austin [see page 15] was the love of his life," Rock continued, "the closest emotional bond he had ever known. The greatest irony of Freddie's life is that though he was essentially gay, the most meaningful relationship was with a woman. Perhaps that had more to do with the woman in question than sexual preference. There was a true love between him and Mary. The sexual thing wasn't nearly so important as their emotional and spiritual bond."

Freddie was by all reports sexually omnivorous and not particularly careful, making him extremely vulnerable to the AIDS epidemic that ravaged the global gay community in the early 1980s.

In October 1986, the British press reported that Freddie had his blood tested for HIV, but when asked about it, the singer denied he had the disease—which might well have been true at that time. According to his last partner, Jim Hutton, Freddie wasn't diagnosed until late April 1987.

Still, from the time of that initial report the British tabloids hounded Freddie, commenting often on his increasingly gaunt appearance and sniffing out former lovers for lurid tales about his sex life.

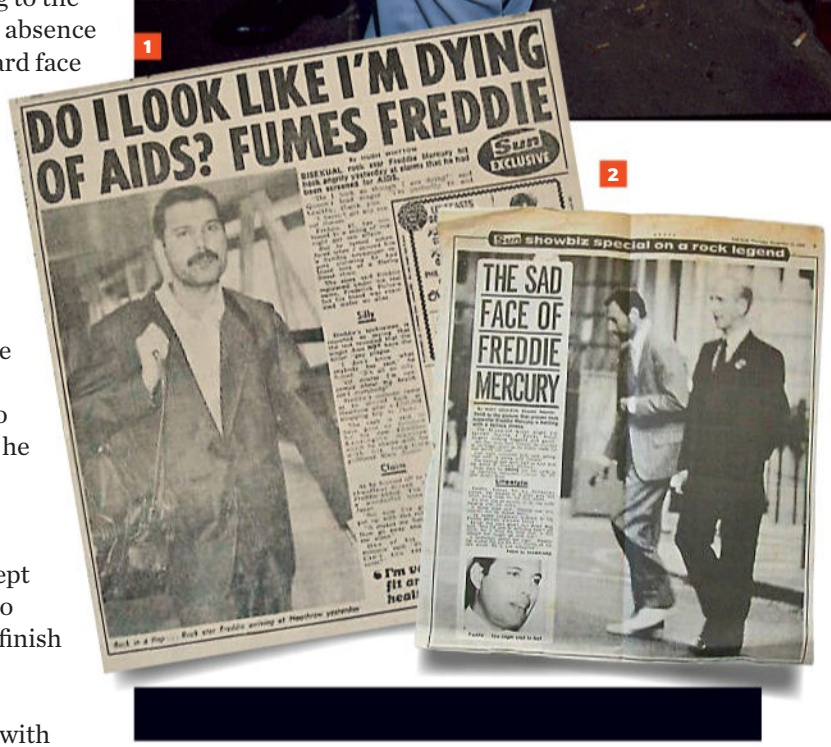
By 1990, Freddie's close friends and colleagues knew he was ill, and they circled the wagons, denying to the press that there was any problem. But Queen's absence from touring and the singer's shockingly haggard face made it increasingly difficult for them to do so. "I don't think any of us will ever forget that day Freddie told us about his illness," said Brian May. "We all just went off and got quietly sick somewhere."

Meanwhile, knowing their time with Freddie was limited, Queen focused on what they loved best: making music. The band released their 13th album, *The Miracle*, in May 1989, but unlike their previous records, they did not support it with a live tour because Freddie had become too fragile. He stayed mum about his health, saying he didn't want his music to sell out of people's sympathy. But he also stated privately that he wanted to "keep working until I f---ing drop."

May would later remember, "[Freddie] just kept saying, 'Write me more. Write me stuff. I want to sing this and do it, and when I am gone you can finish it off.' He had no fear, really."

Although his strength was flagging, Freddie summoned the will to record two more albums with Queen. Ironically, engineer Justin Shirley-Smith would remember his final sessions for *Innuendo* (1991) and *Made in Heaven* (1995) as joyous. "Freddie was one of the funniest people I ever encountered. I was laughing most of the time with him. He said [of his illness], 'I'm not going to think about it, I'm going to do this.'"

And he did until he couldn't. ■



1. Freddie on a rare night out on Aug. 29, 1990, in London. **2.** After it was rumored that he had HIV, the British tabloids were merciless, hounding Freddie every time he stepped out of his house. **3.** The singer performs at a music festival in Barcelona, Spain, to celebrate the arrival of the Olympic flag from Seoul, South Korea, on Oct. 11, 1988. **4.** Freddie shares a kiss with lifelong friend Mary Austin. **5.** The singer poses with Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballé. Their recording of "Barcelona" was adopted as the theme to the city's Olympics in 1992. **6.** Freddie is interviewed during his final visit to Japan in 1986.

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The Last Days of Freddie Mercury

THE QUEEN SINGER'S LIFE ENDED IN THE SAME WAY HE LIVED IT, WITH CLASS AND STYLE.

As anyone familiar with the Old Testament knows, homophobia is an ancient phenomenon, and things hadn't changed much when Freddie Mercury was growing up in the 1950s and '60s. For ages, most gay people felt they had to hide their sexuality, but during the AIDS crisis the stigma associated with gay men in particular soared.

Freddie's Parsee parents practiced Zoroastrianism, a religion that viewed homosexual acts as a form of demon worship. While Freddie remained close to his family throughout his life, he never discussed his sexuality with them. He told his parents that Jim Hutton, his live-in lover, was his gardener.

But in August of 1990, his illness had progressed to such a degree that Freddie felt compelled to overcome his own fears and help his family prepare for his death. Still unable to tell his parents the truth about himself, he instead confided in his sister, Kashmira, and her husband, Roger.

"What you have to understand, my dear Kash, is that what I have is terminal," Freddie said. "I'm going to die."

After his funeral service, Freddie Mercury's body and coffin were taken to Kensal Green Cemetery in West London where he was cremated. His ashes were given to his longtime friend and companion Mary Austin.

Kashmira was devastated but dealt with the news as best as she could, as did all his close friends and relatives.

Elton John admits he didn't visit Freddie as often as he should have because, as a gay man, AIDS was "terrifying." But he saw him enough to confirm that Freddie was brave and filled with humor until the end.

"He wasn't thinking about dying at all," John said. "He showed no fear to me about dying, no fear or sadness. When you went there you had an audience with Freddie." John recalled getting a posthumous Christmas gift of a watercolor painting from Freddie, who had died on Nov. 24, 1991, that still sits next to his bed. "On Christmas morning Tony King [a friend of Freddie's] came around and gave me this pillowcase," John said. "My drag name is Sharon and Freddie's was Melina, and in this beautiful pillowcase was a painting. A note that went with it said, 'Dear Sharon, I saw this at auction, and I thought you would love it. I love you, Melina.' It was really moving. He was dying and he still thought of his friends."

During Freddie's last few months, when he finally could no longer muster the energy to work with Queen in the studio, the singer retired to his home in Kensington, West London. Hutton, chef Joe Fanelli and his former partner Mary Austin did what they could to make him comfortable. During his final days, Freddie began losing his sight and was unable to leave his bed. Sensing that the battle was lost, he chose to bring his life to a close by refusing medication, taking only painkillers. On Nov. 22, 1991, Freddie called Queen's manager, Jim Beach, to his mansion to prepare a statement, which was released the following day.

"Following the enormous conjecture in the press over the last two weeks," it read, "I wish to confirm that I have been tested HIV-positive and have AIDS. I felt it correct to keep this information private to date to protect the privacy of those around me. However, the time has come now for my friends and fans around the world

1

2

"The most important thing, darlings, is to live a fabulous life. As long as it's fabulous, I don't care how long it is."

—FREDDIE MERCURY

1. Freddie's service was held in the chapel of a London church early in the morning of a cold, wintry day. Only a reported 35 to 40 people attended on Nov. 27, 1991. **2.** Freddie's West London mansion where he spent most of his final days. **3.** Among the mourners who paid their respects were close friends Elton John (left) and Brian May. **4.** Roger Taylor (left), musician Dave Clark and Mary Austin remember Freddie.

MYSTERY IN ASHES

ONLY ONE PERSON KNOWS WHERE FREDDIE MERCURY'S ASHES ARE BURIED, AND SHE WILL NEVER TELL.

• **In the days** before his death, Freddie Mercury made one final request of his lifelong friend Mary Austin. He asked that she alone collect his ashes after his cremation and dispose of them at a private location never to be disclosed.

For three decades Austin has stood by Freddie's wishes and kept his final resting place a secret. Not even his parents were told.

Fans have speculated for years where the singer's ashes reside, turning it into a sort of morbid treasure hunt. Some have guessed his native Zanzibar, while others say he was buried under a cherry tree in the Japanese garden of his London mansion. When a monument was erected at a cemetery in West London engraved with his real name, Farrokh Bulsara, in 2013, many thought the mystery had been solved. But Austin shot it down, saying, "Freddie is definitely not in that cemetery."

Expressing empathy, Austin said she understands the need to know where Freddie is buried, but insists she made a lasting promise and intends to keep it. "I never betrayed Freddie in his lifetime," she told the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*. "And I'll never betray him now."

to know the truth, and I hope that everyone will join with me, my doctors and all those worldwide in the fight against this terrible disease."

On Nov. 24, about 24 hours after he issued the statement, Freddie died at age 45 at his Garden Lodge home. The cause was bronchial pneumonia resulting from AIDS, and Austin was given the task of calling Freddie's family to break the news.

The rock icon's funeral, which was presided over by a Zoroastrian priest, was held three days later at West London Crematorium, Kensal Green Cemetery. In attendance were his family and 35 close friends, including Elton John and the members of Queen. His coffin was escorted into the chapel to the sounds of his favorite singer, Aretha Franklin, and Austin took his cremated remains and buried them in an undisclosed location (see sidebar, page 79).

Freddie bequeathed the lion's share of his wealth, including his home and recording royalties, to Austin, and much of the remainder to his parents and sister. He also left £500,000 to Fanelli; £500,000 to his personal assistant Peter Freestone; £100,000 to his driver Terry Giddings, and £500,000 to Hutton. Austin still lives in Freddie's former home with her family.

He would not be forgotten. The band's first tribute came in November 1995. Queen surprised their fans by releasing a final studio album, *Made in Heaven*, featuring previously unreleased final recordings from 1991, as well as outtakes from previous sessions. The album included the song "Mother Love," the last vocal recording Freddie made before his death. After completing the second-to-last verse, he told the band he "wasn't feeling that great," and that he'd "finish it when I come back next time."

There was no next time. A few years after Freddie's passing, Brian May, who knew how much Freddie loved the song, stepped up and recorded the final verse himself. It was one last instance in which a member of Queen showed that they were always there for each other. ■

Flowers and tributes poured in from all over the world. A heart-shaped arrangement and a personal note were provided by close friend and confidant Elton John.

Actor Rami Malek in his brilliant portrayal of Freddie Mercury in the film *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Rhap Stars

AFTER THE ROARING SUCCESS OF *BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY*, THE FREDDIE MERCURY BIOPIC, QUEEN ONCE AGAIN RULED THE WORLD.

Getting a movie made is complicated, but getting the Queen movie, *Bohemian Rhapsody,* off the ground was notoriously difficult even by Hollywood standards. After it had been announced in 2010, at least two high-profile actors, Sacha Baron Cohen and Ben Whishaw, came and went before Rami Malek signed on to play Freddie Mercury. David Fincher, then Tom Hooper were rumored to direct, until Bryan Singer was hired. Singer then walked out mid-shoot due to a series of terrible battles with the cast, leaving Dexter Fletcher to pick up the pieces.

Usually this kind of behind-the-scenes tumult spells disaster on the big screen, but somehow *Bohemian Rhapsody* overcame all those obstacles to become the surprise hit of 2018. The critics gave *Bohemian Rhapsody* mixed reviews, but audiences loved it, buying over $900 million worth of tickets worldwide. Additionally, the film went on to become the recipient of four Academy Awards, including Best Actor for Malek.

So, was the movie bad? Was it good? Was it so bad that it was good?

Stephanie Zacharek of *Time* perhaps summed up the movie's strange magic best when she wrote: "In strict filmmaking terms, *Bohemian Rhapsody* is a bit of a mess. Some of its scenes connect awkwardly, and it hits every beat of disaster and triumph squarely, like a gong. Yet, if it has many of the problems we associate with 'bad' movies, it has more ragged energy than so many good ones, largely because of Rami Malek's performance as Mercury, all glitter and muscle and nerve endings...a movie for sensualists, not quality-control experts."

There is no question that Malek's depiction of Freddie was indeed extraordinary, causing one *Rolling Stone* writer to marvel, "The actor digs so deep into the role that we can't believe we're not watching the real thing."

Surprisingly, Malek was only casually acquainted with Freddie and the music of Queen when he got the role, but he more than made up for his lack of knowledge by studying assiduously. To prepare for the award-winning performance he had to learn to talk with prosthetic teeth, work many hours with a movement coach to capture the singer's distinctive stage mannerisms, study with an accent coach and take piano and singing lessons. The actor, however, felt the real key to the role was understanding the Queen singer internally. Malek points out that Freddie was gay and an immigrant, and that he often felt like a fish out of water, "but when he got out on the stage, he held everyone's attention and said, 'Hey, I may have been an outcast and a misfit, and I may feel like I don't belong, but here on this stage, we belong together.' It is the most beautiful thing to see realized."

Malek's electrifying performance aside, many fans and critics had problems with the film's dozens of inaccuracies—many apparent to even the most casual fans of the band. Some of the more egregious falsehoods were:

- Freddie did not meet Mary Austin on the same night he joined the band.
- John Reid wasn't fired as Queen's manager after an argument with Freddie over his solo career.
- Freddie was not the first Queen member to release a solo project.
- Longtime love Jim Hutton was not a server at one of Freddie's parties; he

1. Actor Rami Malek with his Oscar. 2. Brian May (left), Malek and Roger Taylor share a Golden Globe. 3. Freddie's sister, Kashmira Cooke, and Queen manager John Reid attend the world premiere of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at London's SSE Arena Wembley.

was a hairdresser who met the singer at a nightclub.

- Queen never split up, so Live Aid was not a reunion.
- Freddie learned he had HIV between 1986 and 1987, not before Live Aid in 1985.
- Many of the songs are shown out of chronological order... and the list goes on.

But of the many opinions, perhaps one of the few that really mattered was Queen guitarist Brian May's. And he loved the movie.

"Oh, there were about a thousand moments when we doubted it was going to get made. It was a very bumpy ride, but that's the way life is," May said. "Things are not always straightforward, and perhaps in the end they're better for it. In a way it mirrors the actual history of the band. We hardly had a smooth path in Queen, but some of those moments of adversity do make you stronger, and it's the same for the film. I wouldn't even hesitate to say I think it's wonderful."

And May said he thought Freddie would've loved it, as well. ■

MAKE A BIG NOISE!

FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS, *WE WILL ROCK YOU* HAS BROUGHT FREDDIE MERCURY'S SPIRIT TO THE ENTIRE WORLD.

• **"Not being fans** of musical theater on the whole, we weren't convinced that a musical based on Queen songs would work," Brian May said. "For us to be involved, we needed it to work in a theatrical context but retain the rock, whilst also incorporating the spectacle, uniqueness and humor embodied by Queen. The challenge was that we would somehow have to make it our own."

Fortunately, playwright Ben Elton and the surviving band members were able to rise to the occasion. The result was *We Will Rock You*, a 2002 jukebox hit musical that enjoyed a record-smashing 12-year run in London and continues to tour internationally to this day.

The show tells the story of a group of bohemians who struggle to restore the free exchange of thought and fashion in a distant future where everyone dresses, thinks and acts alike. Musical instruments are forbidden, and rock music is all but unknown.

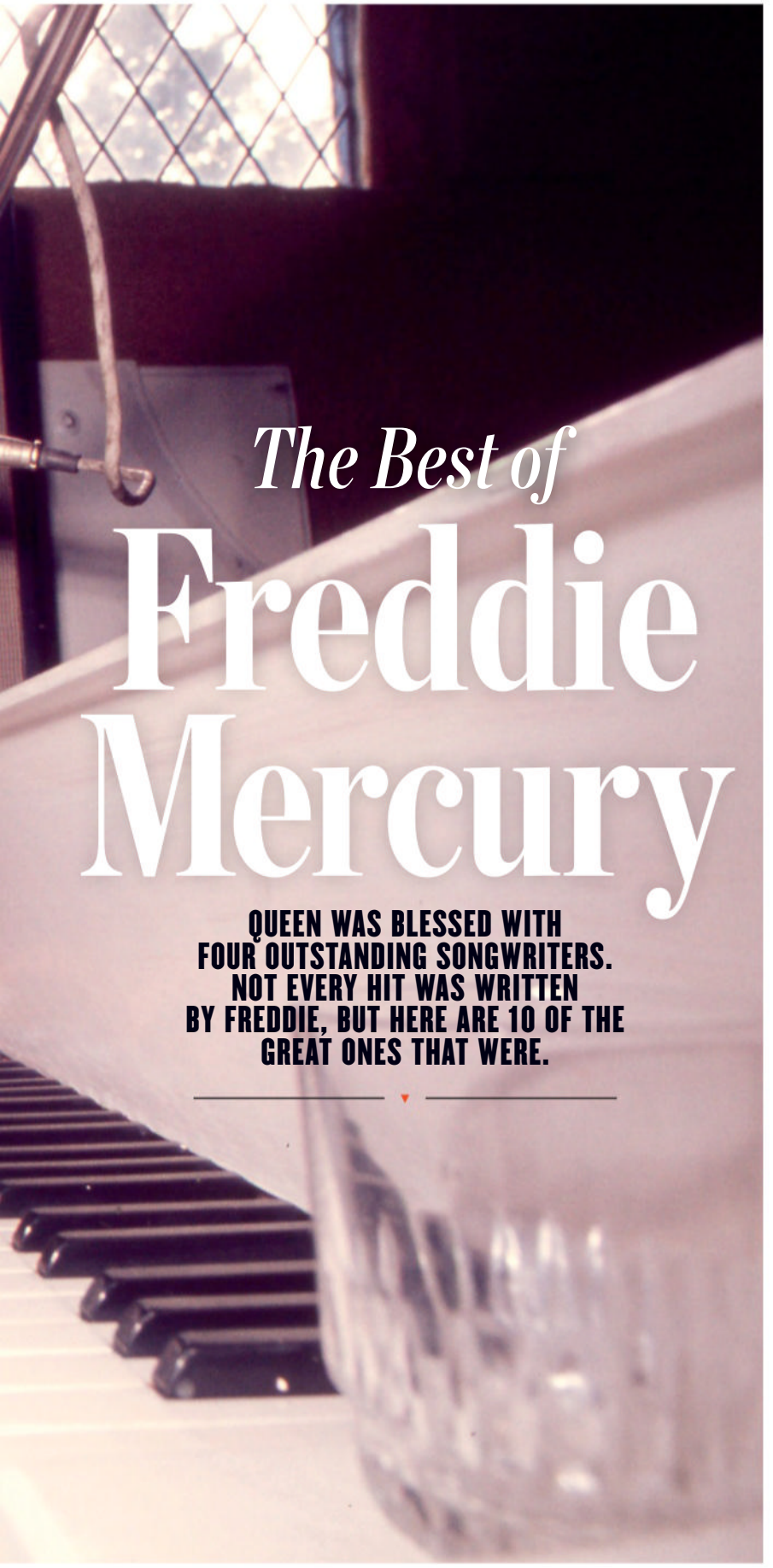
Critics gave the show a lukewarm reception, but theatergoers loved it, and *We Will Rock You* went on to become the 11th-longest-running musical in West End (London's Broadway) history. It has since been staged in 19 other countries.

Featuring over 24 Queen classics and characters with names like Galileo, Killer Queen and Scaramouche, the musical pays tribute to the group's iconography while creating its own special world.

"I had this strange thought that it's quite possible that this musical might be the thing through which people know our music in 300 years," said May. "I'm quite shocked at how fresh this stuff still sounds."

Roger Taylor and Brian May have kept Queen's music alive on London's West End and all over the world.

Freddie sits at a white grand piano during the recording of *A Night at the Opera* at Ridge Farm Studios, West Sussex, U.K., on July 14, 1975.



The Best of Freddie Mercury

QUEEN WAS BLESSED WITH FOUR OUTSTANDING SONGWRITERS. NOT EVERY HIT WAS WRITTEN BY FREDDIE, BUT HERE ARE 10 OF THE GREAT ONES THAT WERE.

"LIAR"

***QUEEN*/1973**

Those who thought that "Bohemian Rhapsody" came out of nowhere clearly hadn't been listening to Queen very carefully. This elaborate, 6-minute and 27-second multipart epic, written by Freddie Mercury, was recorded by the group three years before "Rhapsody." It's all here: the layered vocals, shifting dynamics and Freddie's dramatic delivery. Breathtaking.

"OGRE BATTLE" AND "THE FAIRY FELLER'S MASTER-STROKE"

***QUEEN II*/1974**

Among fans, *Queen II* is the cult favorite. Filled with fairy-tale lyrics straight out of Hans Christian Andersen and thunderous heavy metal guitar riffs, it is both fascinating and exceptionally weird. The one-two punch of Freddie's hard-hitting "Ogre Battle" and hilariously twee "The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke" will either bring a delighted smile to your face or have you racing for the stop button. Regardless of how you feel, both of these songs established Freddie as a singularly creative force.

"KILLER QUEEN" AND "STONE COLD CRAZY"

***SHEER HEART ATTACK*/1974**

On *Sheer Heart Attack*, Queen's third studio album, the group embraced tighter, pop-centric song structures without losing the signature style and intelligence of their first two efforts. "Killer Queen," the first of Freddie's killer songs off this album, is a tune about a high-class prostitute. It proved

to be both the band's first international hit as well as one of the cleverest songs to come out of the 1970s. Freddie had a reputation for having a sharp wit, and it is on full display here. While Freddie and Queen were known for their carefully layered sound, they could also get down and dirty with the best of them. Some call "Stone Cold Crazy," Freddie's second gem on *Shear Heart Attack*, the first thrash metal song ever recorded. If that sounds like a bit of hyperbole, note that Metallica—the ruling thrash metal band formed by James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich—covered it 15 years later and used it as a B-side of their monster hit "Enter Sandman."

"BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY"

***A NIGHT AT THE OPERA*/1975**

▸ While it might be going too far to say that "Bohemian Rhapsody" is the greatest pop song ever written, it certainly is the most audacious. An idiosyncratic mash-up of Gilbert and Sullivan light opera and the heavy metal of Black Sabbath, it was the piece of music Queen was born to make. While the band's craftsmanship helped bring it to life, it was Freddie's keen sense of the absurd that made it work. Magnifico!

"SOMEBODY TO LOVE"

***A DAY AT THE RACES*/1976**

▸ So how on Earth could Queen succeed in following up on their "Bohemian Rhapsody" success? Leave it to Freddie, who decided to write a gospel song on which the four band members replicate "a 100-voice choir." Reportedly, this was Freddie's favorite song in the entire Queen catalog.

"WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS"

***NEWS OF THE WORLD*/1977**

▸ To the uninitiated, this song probably sounded like the most bombastic three minutes of braggadocio ever committed to vinyl. "It's the most egotistical and arrogant song I've ever written," Freddie said at the time. But Queen's savvy audience understood the "we" in the song referred not just to the band but also its fans. It's the ultimate anthem for celebratory occasions.

"CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE"

***THE GAME*/1980**

▸ For a while it seemed like every new Queen production was going to be bigger and more outlandish than its predecessor, so it was refreshing when Freddie gave a nod to the 1950s and delivered this rockabilly-esque tribute to Elvis.

"MOTHER LOVE"

***MADE IN HEAVEN*/1995**

▸ Released five years after Freddie's death, "Mother Love" was the last song he wrote with Brian May as well as his final recorded vocal performance. A beautiful song about the singer's long and terrible struggle with AIDS, it speaks to the cyclical nature of life and death. Featuring samples from Queen songs that touch on his entire career, it's a poignant farewell, made even more so by his fragile, disease-ravaged singing. While Freddie did his best to finish the song, his strength gave out and it was left unfinished. It took two years for the grief-stricken May to enter a studio and complete the vocal. ■

QUEEN ON THE SCREEN

IF YOU LOVED *BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY* AND WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE BAND, HERE ARE SOME STELLAR DOCUMENTARIES.

• As terrific as Rami Malek's portrayal of Freddie Mercury was in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, there's nothing quite like the real thing. The following are five surprisingly high-quality films about Queen that present the real band in all of their royal glory. The best part is you don't even have to leave your home.

BECOMING QUEEN (2004)

Amazon Prime features a host of free Queen documentaries offering different perspectives of the band. This one is notable for spending a significant amount of time on Queen's early days and the contributions of all four members. There's no music, but the interviews and footage offer a rare and candid glimpse at the entire arc of their career.

QUEEN: DAYS OF OUR LIVES (2011)

Hailed by Queen enthusiasts as one of the best and most comprehensive documentaries of the bunch, this two-hour film features substantial interviews with the band and lots of concert and behind-the-scenes footage, culminating in an all-star 1992 tribute to Freddie at Wembley Stadium, including appearances by David Bowie, George Michael and Elton John. It's available via Qello Concerts by Stingray at qello.com.

FREDDIE MERCURY: THE GREAT PRETENDER (2012)

This Emmy-winning doc, also available at qello.com, spotlights Freddie's attempts to forge a solo career in the mid-1980s, adding plenty of depth and dimension to the legend. Included here is rare audio of a collaboration with Michael Jackson, and details about his collaboration with Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballé.

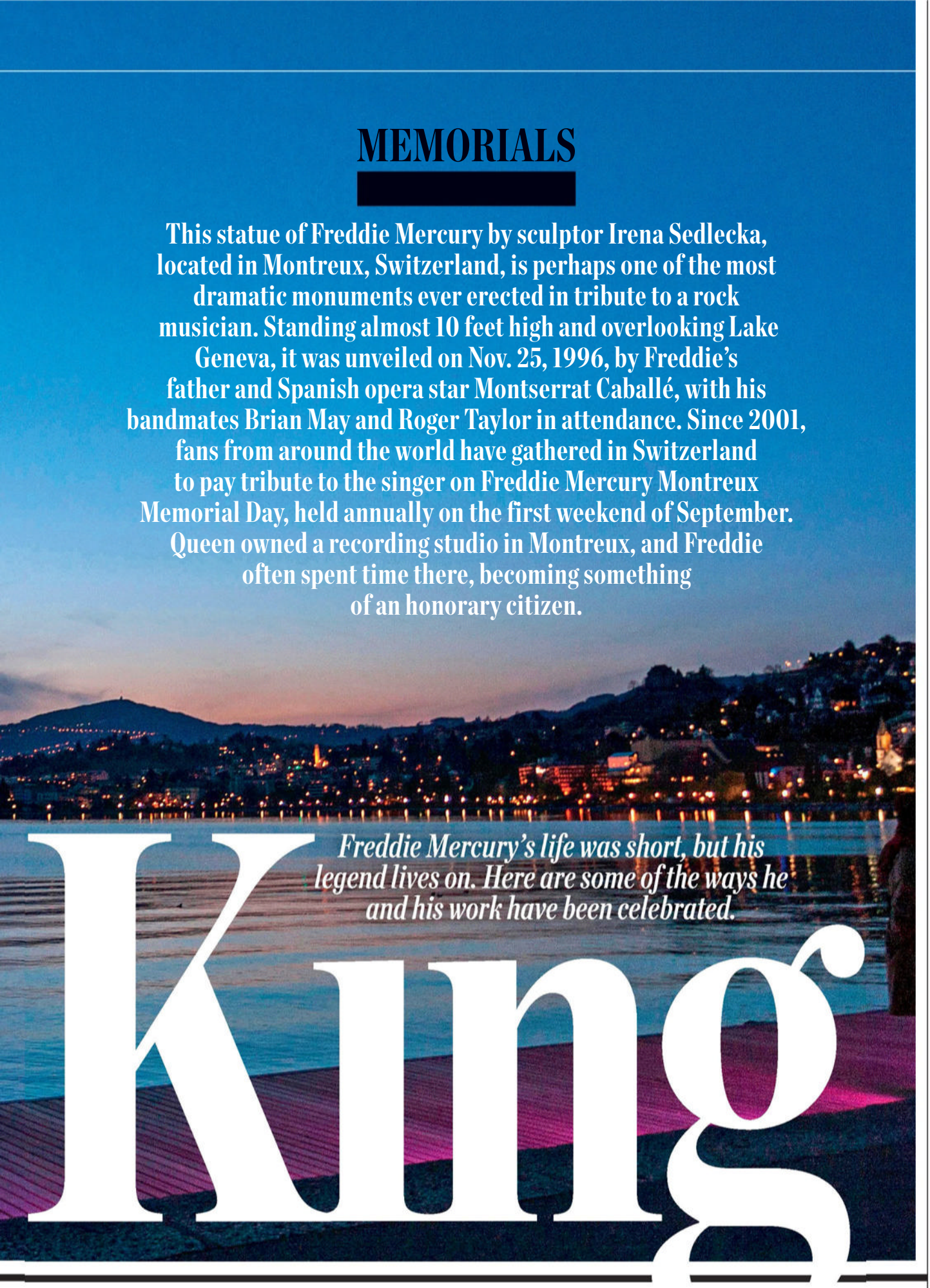
INSIDE THE RHAPSODY (2015)

The Queen masterpiece "Bohemian Rhapsody" is one of the few songs in rock history that is so complex and well-crafted it justifiably merits its own 45-minute documentary. The video features often humorous conversations with drummer Roger Taylor, guitarist Brian May and engineer Justin Shirley Smith, but the real highlight is when May goes through the entire song and breaks down its isolated vocal and instrumental tracks. Quite astounding. It's free to stream on Queen's YouTube channel at youtube.com/queenofficial.

QUEEN: ROCK THE WORLD (2017)

This wonderful documentary pulls together long-lost footage from Queen's 1977 tour of America and features intimate fly-on-the-wall footage of the band recording their classic *News of the World* album. Just some of the astonishing highlights include video of the band recording megahits like "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions." This doc is available via PBS Passport, a donation-based streaming service offered by many public stations and pbs.org.

Hail to the



MEMORIALS

This statue of Freddie Mercury by sculptor Irena Sedlecka, located in Montreux, Switzerland, is perhaps one of the most dramatic monuments ever erected in tribute to a rock musician. Standing almost 10 feet high and overlooking Lake Geneva, it was unveiled on Nov. 25, 1996, by Freddie's father and Spanish opera star Montserrat Caballé, with his bandmates Brian May and Roger Taylor in attendance. Since 2001, fans from around the world have gathered in Switzerland to pay tribute to the singer on Freddie Mercury Montreux Memorial Day, held annually on the first weekend of September. Queen owned a recording studio in Montreux, and Freddie often spent time there, becoming something of an honorary citizen.

Freddie Mercury's life was short, but his legend lives on. Here are some of the ways he and his work have been celebrated.

King

Brian May, Freddie's mother, Jer, and Roger Taylor at the 2001 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction of Queen.

ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME

Queen was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland in 2001 by Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins of Foo Fighters. Guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor performed a live version of "We Will Rock You" to open the show, with the duo trading lead vocals in place of their deceased lead singer. The band was also given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and became the first group to be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, which up to that point bestowed the honor only on individuals.

ENGLISH HERITAGE BLUE PLAQUE

In 1866, London began a tradition of placing commemorative blue plaques on the face of buildings to honor the notable men and women who lived or worked in them. In 2009, one such marker was unveiled at 22 Gladstone Avenue, Feltham, West London, where Freddie and his family lived upon their arrival in England in 1964. Freddie's sister, Kashmira Cooke, remarked, "Mum and I are so proud and pleased that English Heritage is honoring our Freddie with a blue plaque, and that he will be amongst other famous names forever."

STAMPS

In 1999, a Royal Mail stamp with an image of Freddie performing onstage was issued as part of the U.K. postal service's Millennium Stamp series, which recognized elements of British life, including great entertainers, since A.D. 1000. The stamp caused a slight uproar when an unapproving newspaper columnist took the Royal Mail to task for honoring a singer with a "degenerate lifestyle."

HIGH IN THE SKY

In September 2017, Norwegian airline had a portrait of Freddie painted on a tail fin of two of its aircraft to mark what would have been his 71st birthday. He joined five other Britons so honored: the novelist Jane Austen, children's author Roald Dahl, the 1966 FIFA World Cup-winning captain Bobby Moore, pioneering pilot Amy Johnson and aviation entrepreneur Sir Freddie Laker.

GOOGLE DOODLE

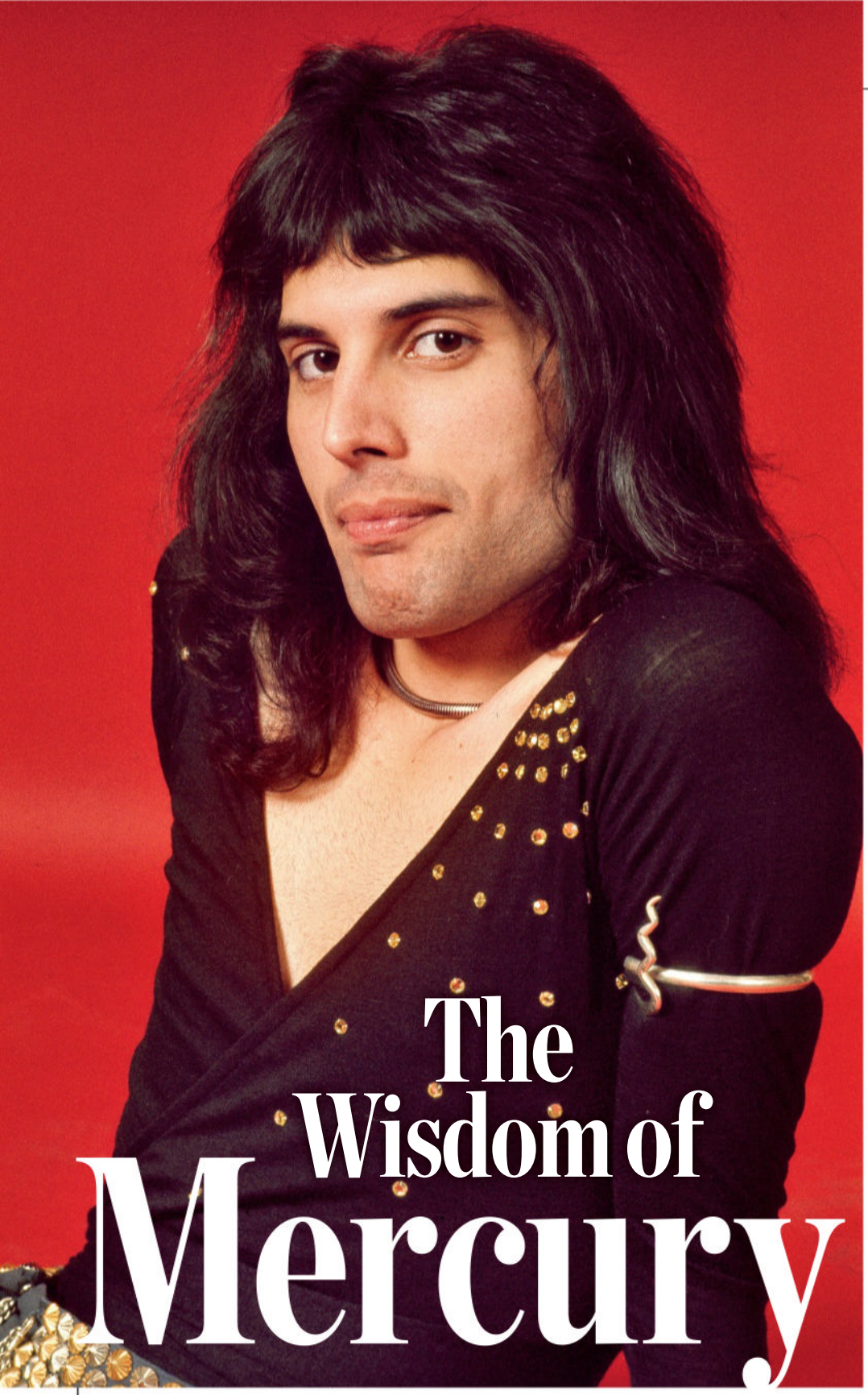
On Sept. 5, 2011, on what would have been Freddie's 65th birthday, Google celebrated the charismatic entertainer's life with its Google Doodle for that day—an animation set to his song "Don't Stop Me Now." Jennifer Horn, one of the Doodle's designers, posted, "Working on this project for Freddie Mercury's birthday was an absolute blast.... The development of this 90-second tribute took about four months—most of which went into planning the visual style of the doodle." (The Doodle can be viewed at youtube.com/watch?v=7zVvDZx8AqE.)

rainbow honor walk

In August 2019, a bronze plaque bearing Freddie's likeness was installed on San Francisco's Rainbow Honor Walk, which recognizes LGBTQ people who've "made significant contributions in their fields."

FROG PRINCE

A frog genus discovered in 2013 in Kerala, India—near the town where Freddie attended boarding school—was named Mercurana myristicapalustris in his honor. That same year, a species of damselfly discovered in Brazil was dubbed Heteragrion freddiemercuryi, after the "superb and gifted musician and songwriter whose wonderful voice and talent still entertain millions."



The Wisdom of Mercury

WITH HIS SHARP MIND AND QUICK WIT, FREDDIE MERCURY ALWAYS HAD A WAY WITH WORDS. HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE.

"I've never considered myself the leader of Queen. It's the four of us that make the whole thing work. It's 25 percent down the line. I'm just the one out front, that's all."

"We're the Cecil B. DeMille of rock 'n' roll—always wanting to do things bigger and better!"

"I pray I'll never get AIDS. So many friends have it. Some have died, others won't last much longer. I'm terrified that I'll be next. Immediately after I have sex I think, 'Suppose that was the one? Suppose the virus is now in my body?' I jump in the shower and try to scrub myself clean although I know it's useless."

"I don't expect to make old bones, and what's more, I don't really care. I certainly don't have any aspirations to live to 70. I would be so boring. I will be dead and gone long before that."

"Onstage I could cause a riot if I wanted to. You suddenly think, 'I've got all the power. I can destroy!' But I know in myself that I would never misuse it. No, I'm too wonderful for that, darlings!"

"I actually enjoy being a bitch. I enjoy being surrounded by bitches. I certainly don't go looking for the most perfect people, because I'd find that boring."

"I don't take myself too seriously. I wouldn't wear these clothes if I was serious."

"I'm not worried about getting fat—in fact, I'd love to put on a bit of weight and be a bit plump. I'm not bad for 39, not bad at all. And no face-lifts here. There are probably people looking for tucks when they lift my hair back, but no, there is no plastic surgery here!"

"In the end we know that the songs speak for themselves. If you write a really crappy song, it won't sound any better because you're wearing wonderful clothes."

"Will I get to heaven? No. I don't want to. Hell is much better. Look at all the interesting people you're going to meet down there!"

"I never try to analyze myself. I hate that kind of thing."

"I don't give a damn about critics. The press is only important at the beginning of your career. When success arrives, it's the fans who decide on whether it's to be or not to be."

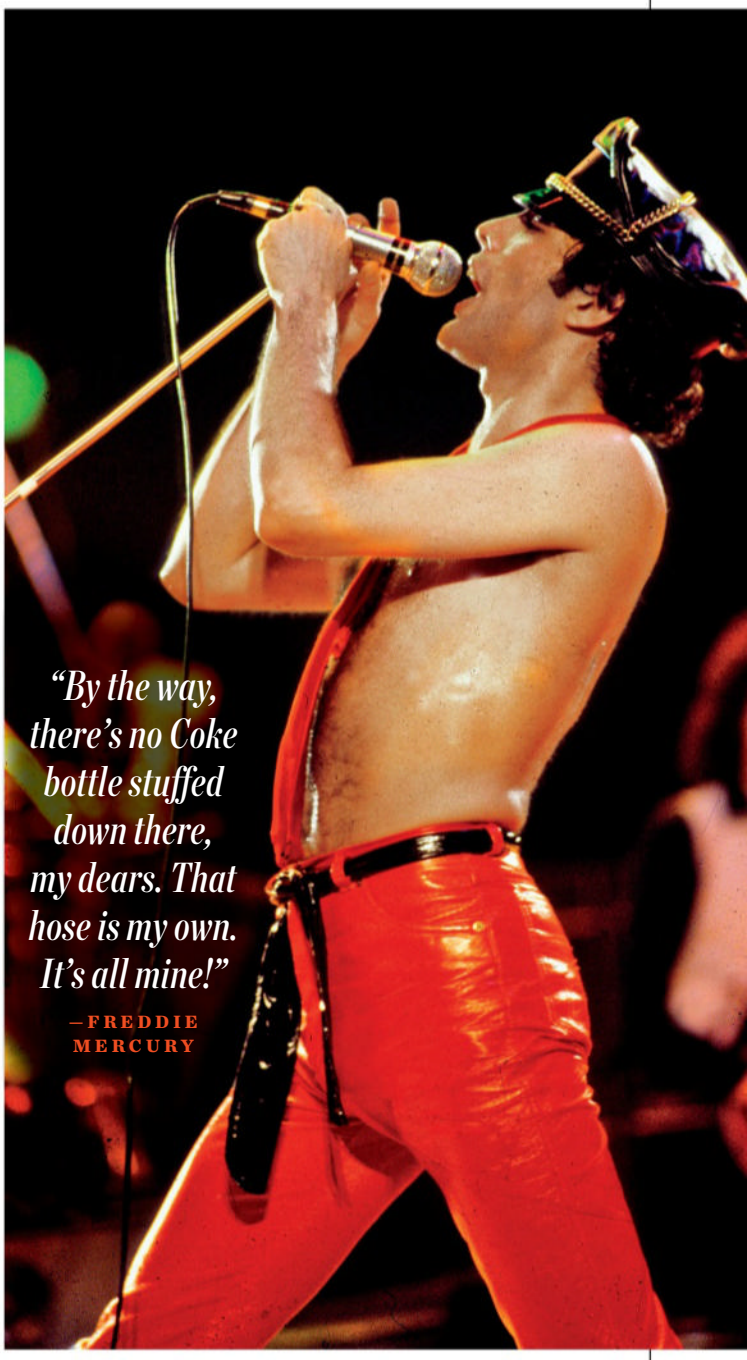
"Staying successful at our level is hard. The public can be very fickle, but in one way I like that. You really can't rest on your laurels. You've got to have nerves of steel to survive the pace."

"I've had upheavals and I've had immense problems, but I've had a wonderful time and I have no regrets. Oh dear, I sound like Edith Piaf!"

"When I'm dead, I want to be remembered as a musician of some worth and substance. I don't know how they will remember me. I haven't thought about that—dead and gone. It's up to them. When I'm dead, who cares? I won't."

"Money may be vulgar, but it's wonderful!"

"Some people can take second-best, but I can't. I look upon it as a defeat. If you've got a taste for being number one then number two isn't good enough." ■



"By the way, there's no Coke bottle stuffed down there, my dears. That hose is my own. It's all mine!"

—FREDDIE MERCURY

The Ultimate Freddie Mercury Quiz

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE ROCK STAR?

Freddie Mercury performs in his famous yellow jacket at Wembley Stadium in 1986, one year after his legendary performance there in Live Aid.

1. Who was Freddie Mercury's favorite singer?

A. Robert Plant
B. Wilson Pickett
C. Aretha Franklin
D. David Bowie
E. Elton John

2. What did Freddie collect as a child?

A. Coins
B. Toy pianos
C. Stamps
D. Guitars
E. Bow ties

3. Freddie graduated from college with a degree in what subject?

A. Fashion
B. Architecture
C. Music composition
D. Graphic design and illustration
E. Animal science

4. Who did Queen approach to produce *Queen II*?

A. George Martin
B. David Bowie
C. Phil Spector
D. Jimmy Page
E. Brian Wilson

5. Which one of Freddie's compositions was declared the

catchiest song in the history of pop music by a team of experts?
A. "The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke"
B. "Don't Stop Me Now"
C. "Bohemian Rhapsody"
D. "This Thing Called Love"
E. "We Are the Champions"

6. What was the original name of the band Queen?
A. Smile
B. The Royals
C. The Crown Jewels
D. Mercury Rising
E. May Day

7. Where was the snowy outdoor video for "We Will Rock You" shot?
A. Hyde Park in London
B. Brian May's grandmother's house
C. Central Park in New York
D. Roger Taylor's backyard
E. Denver, while Queen was on an American tour

8. *A Night at the Opera* was named after a movie starring which comedy team?
A. The Marx Brothers
B. Laurel and Hardy
C. Abbot and Costello
D. Monty Python
E. The Three Stooges

9. Queen's first tour of the United States was as the opening act for what band?
A. Bad Company
B. Mott the Hoople
C. Deep Purple
D. Alice Cooper
E. UFO

10. How many people worldwide watched the Live Aid concert on television?
A. 100 million
B. 550 million
C. 1.9 billion
D. 2.5 billion
E. 3.1 billion

11. To whom did Freddie dedicate a song on the 1982 album *Hot Space*?
A. Jimi Hendrix
B. John Lennon
C. Buzz Aldrin
D. Oscar Wilde
E. John Deacon

12. What was Freddie's favorite movie?
A. *Cabaret*
B. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*
C. *Flash Gordon*
D. *A Clockwork Orange*
E. *Some Like It Hot*

13. What was Freddie's favorite color?
A. Black
B. Red
C. Yellow
D. Pink
E. He loved all colors equally

14. Who inducted Queen into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2001?
A. Axl Rose
B. Elton John
C. Lady Gaga
D. Dave Grohl
E. Katy Perry

Freddie left his stunning home in Kensington to his former partner and longtime friend Mary Austin.

15. What did Freddie regard as his greatest song?
A. "Ogre Battle"
B. "Somebody to Love"
C. "Bohemian Rhapsody"
D. "Love of My Life"
E. "Killer Queen"

16. What did Freddie pay for his magnificent Georgian mansion in Garden Lodge, Kensington, in 1980?
A. £1.1 million
B. £750,000
C. £250,000 in cash
D. £500,000 in cash
E. Nothing—it was a gift from his record label

17. What was Freddie's favorite alcoholic drink?
A. Dirty martini
B. Old-Fashioned
C. Screwdriver
D. White Russian
E. Vodka and tonic

18. Freddie's last video with Queen was for what song?
A. "These Are the Days of Our Lives"
B. "One Vision"
C. "Let Me in Your Heart Again"
D. "Heaven for Everyone"
E. "The Show Must Go On"

19. What was Freddie's astrological sign?
A. Aries
B. Taurus
C. Scorpio
D. Virgo
E. Pisces

20. What was Freddie's estimated net worth at the time of his death in 1991?
A. $10 million
B. $30 million
C. $50 million
D. $75 million
E. $100 million

For answers, see page 98.

ANNIVERSARY SPOTLIGHT® COLLECTOR'S EDITION

FREDDIE MERCURY

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QUIZ ANSWERS **1.** C, **2.** C, **3.** D, **4.** B, **5.** E, **6.** A, **7.** D, **8.** A, **9.** B, **10.** C, **11.** B, **12.** E, **13.** C, **14.** D, **15.** B, **16.** D, **17.** E, **18.** A, **19.** D, **20.** B

According to Freddie Mercury, here onstage with Queen in New York City in 1977, "A concert is not a live rendition of our album. It's a theatrical event."

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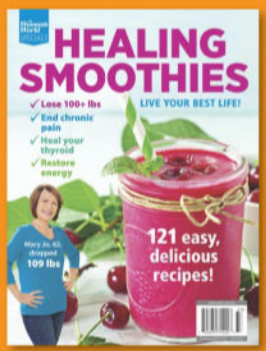

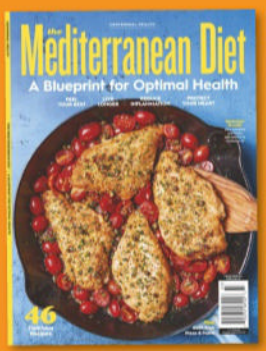

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"We've gone overboard on every Queen album. But that's Queen."

–FREDDIE MERCURY

John Deacon, Roger Taylor, Brian May and Freddie Mercury strike a pose at London's Heathrow Airport in 1974.